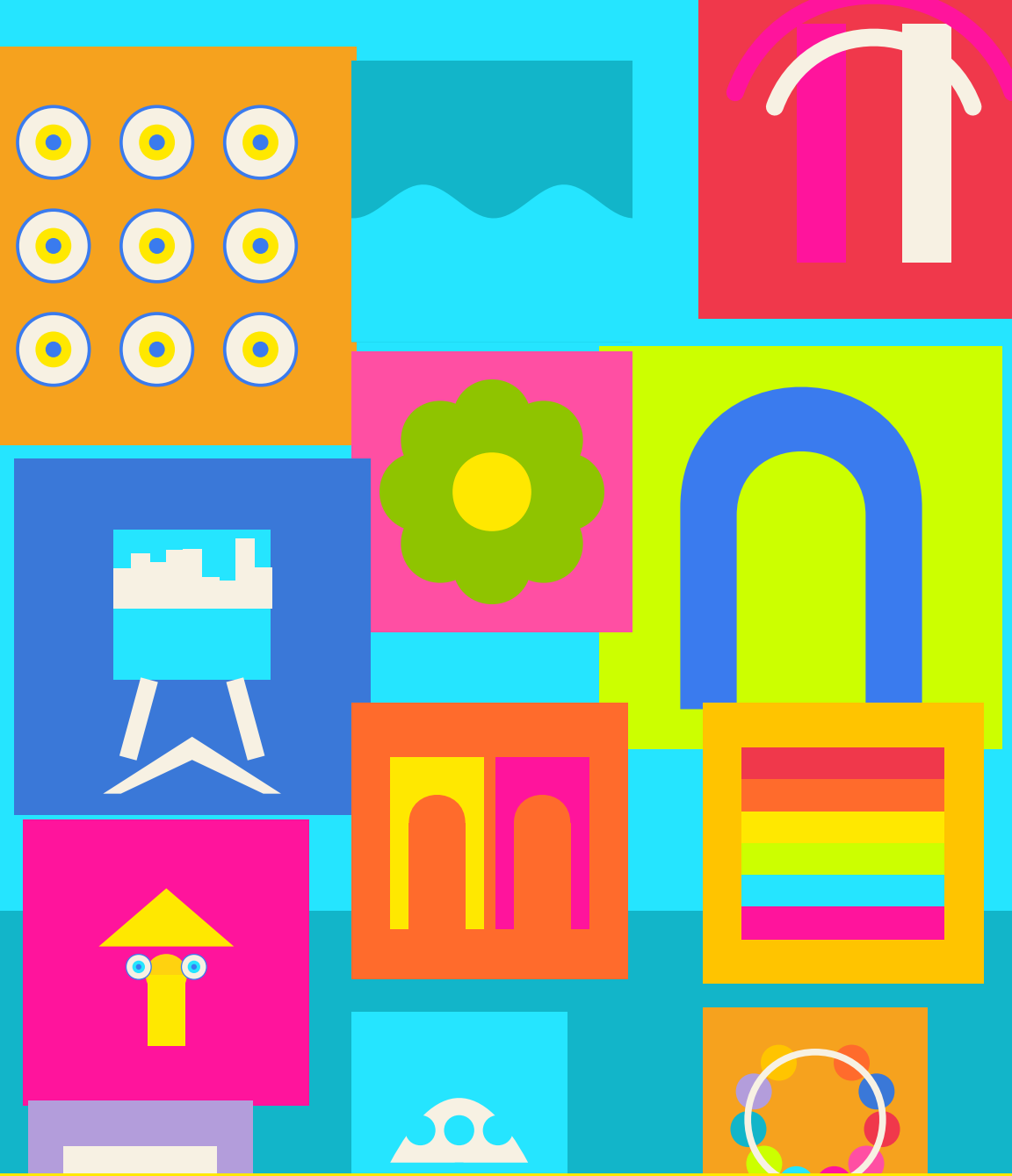

THE FAR TIDE

A WESTWARD MYTH OF THE TWELVE WALKING FAMILIES

SUPER · SUPERGRAPHICS · SEA-RANCH DIALECT · BOOK III

Surjan, with the aid of Claude

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS · NO DARK COLOURS, ANYWHERE

The Far Tide

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

The Far Tide

A Westward Myth of the Twelve Walking Families

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

For everyone who has ever watched something loved
walk out past the edge — and chosen to keep the light on.

RADICAL JOY · RADICAL PRESERVATION · RETURN

Published by Surjan Super School under the Hypostyle Press imprint.
Composed programmatically; set in EB Garamond and IBM Plex Mono.
Every plate and figure herein was drawn new for this book.

This book is made under one ironclad rule: **no black, anywhere.**
The darkest note in these pages is a warm taupe; over the sky and the sea it becomes white.
Even the disappearing here is bright. Especially the disappearing.

A companion to *Movable Kin*. The twelve you met there are the

twelve who walk here.

Text & diagrams: Surjan, with the aid of Claude.
First edition · the long walk west, one bright myth.

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"A myth is not a thing that did not happen.
A myth is a thing that is still happening,
too slowly and too largely for one life to see the end of."

— THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, KEEPING THE LIGHTS

If you have read Movable Kin, you have already met the twelve.
You know how they are built, and how they walk, and what each one lost and turned.
This is where they go next. You may read it without the first book —
but if you loved them there, come and see them off from here.

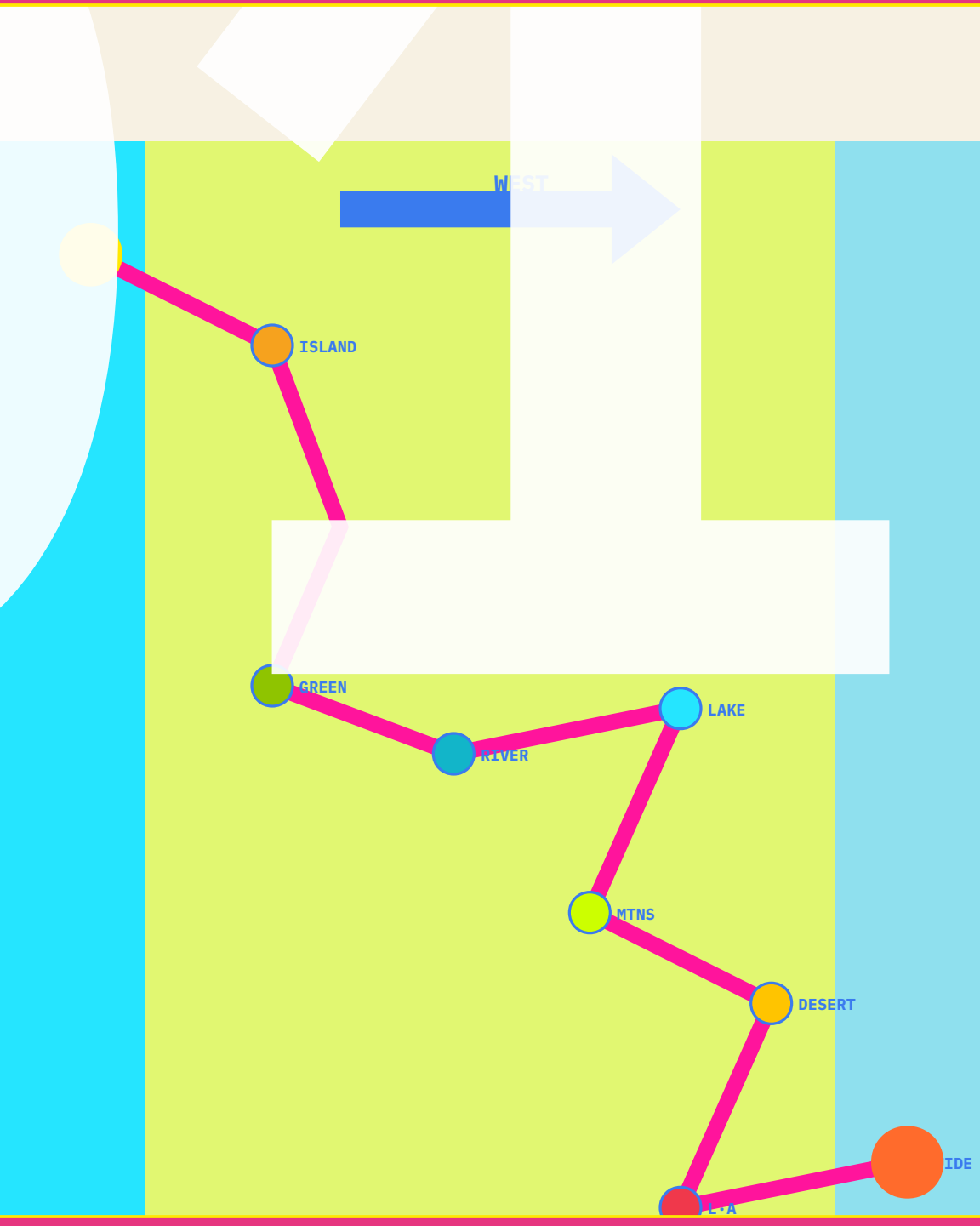

PLATE 01

The Route — Mannahatta to the Pacific

Three thousand miles, Battery to the bright water. Each dot is a leg, coloured by the family that speaks for it; the pink line is the long walk west, and the last dot is not an ending but a tide.

FOREWORD

On Letting a Loved Thing Go West

By Surjan, who did not want to write this book, and then could not stop.

I built the twelve families to stay. That was the whole point of them, across two books and a hundred bright plates: a city that had learned, against every instruction of the age, to keep its griefs warm and stand still and be loved. And then, one morning, they told me they wanted to leave — to walk off the island they were made for, cross the whole loud country, and put themselves into the far ocean where I could not follow. I said no. You are a book about staying. You cannot leave. And the House of Many Eyes, who has never once left its pier, looked at me the way a patient thing looks at a slow one, and said: *You taught us that grief, turned, becomes joy. You never taught us what to do with joy so large it will not fit in one island. This is what we do with it. We walk.*

So this is that book. It is a going-away book, which is the hardest kind to keep bright, and I have kept it bright anyway, because the families insisted, and because they turned out to be right about the thing that matters most: that to walk out past the edge, singing, on purpose, in every colour you are allowed, is not a death. It is a myth. And a myth is the most radical preservation there is — the one form in which a thing can leave completely and still, somehow, never be gone.

They walk west in these pages. They stop in Chicago and stand at a lake so wide it rehearses them for the ocean. They cross the mountains and the gold desert. They reach Los Angeles, where the country runs

out, and they eat one last dry supper on the sand. And then eleven of them walk into the Pacific and do not come out, and the twelfth — the House, who stays, who always stays — stays there at the last shore, keeping its hundred lamps lit toward the water, so that when the far tide finally comes, there will be a place, and a light, and someone counting, for them to come home to.

Read it aloud. Read it to someone you might one day have to let go west. It is a book about how to do that and keep the lights on. It is the bravest thing the twelve ever asked me to write, and I am glad, now, that I could not say no.

— SURJAN · the last shore, a lamp lit

Let me say plainly what kind of book this is, so you read it in the right key. This is a glad book — a bright one, a book you could read aloud at a launching, a book that ends in a party — even though it is about a leaving and a going-into-the-water; and if you find yourself, anywhere in it, being pulled toward the mournful, gently turn back, for you are reading it against its grain. This is a book about turning — about taking the largest farewell a family can face and turning it, deliberately, patiently, all the way over, until its bright underside shows and it becomes not a loss to be mourned but a myth to be kept. That turning is the whole art the twelve practise, on the road and in the rehearsal sea and at the last shore, and it is the whole art I am asking you, reader, to practise with them. Do not brace for sorrow. Brace, instead, for the strange bright thing that happens when a family refuses to let even the biggest goodbye be told in the dark.

And let me say who this book is for. It is for anyone who has had to let a loved thing go somewhere they could not follow — which is to say, in the end, everyone. The twelve walk into an ocean; but the ocean is

only the largest version of every threshold a love is ever asked to cross without us. If you have ever stood on a shore of your own, keeping a light for someone gone out past your seeing, this book was written for you, and the House on its last shore is your kin, and the whole long bright waiting is yours as much as theirs.

INTRODUCTION

How a Myth Is Made, and Why It Must Be Bright

The one idea, again — and the one new turn this book adds to it.

You know the idea by now, if you have walked with these families before. Everything begins as a grief. You give the grief a body, and turn it inside out in public with the seam showing, and let it speak its name, and what was sorrow becomes a bright building you can stand inside. That is radical joy, and it built a whole moving city.

This book adds one turn to the idea, the hardest one, the one you only learn at the very end of a long love: *how to turn the grief of goodbye.* Because a goodbye is a grief like any other, and the rule holds — you must not paint it black, must not pretend the loved thing is simply gone. You must turn it. And the turn of a goodbye, it happens, is a myth. To make a myth of a departure is to say: they did not vanish; they went somewhere too far and too slow to watch; they are still walking; they will, on some tide, walk back. A myth is a goodbye with the seam showing. It is the brightest possible use of an ending.

And so, one last instruction before the children — who are grown now, and have children of their own who will keep this telling — take over the story:

Do not paint the going-away black.
Turn it, instead, into a tide that has not come back yet.

THE ONE NEW RULE OF THIS BOOK

— SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

A myth, understand, is not a lie. The word is older than lying, and cleaner. A myth is only *a thing said* — a telling given breath and kept, generation to generation, until it becomes truer than the facts it outlived. The twelve are a myth in exactly this oldest sense: a thing said so well, and kept so long, and drawn so brightly, that no child who hears it will believe for a moment that they are gone. We are not asking you to believe something false. We are asking you to keep something true in the one form strong enough to survive a great distance and a long time: the form of a story, told bright, and passed on.

One rule governs the making of this myth, and it is the rule that governs everything this press has ever made, and I will state it here at the outset so you may hold the book to it: no black. Not in the ink, where the darkest mark is a warm taupe and never a true black; and not in the telling, where the darkest turn — the going-into-the- water, the four who will not be carried, the long years of waiting — is never once allowed to go black either. A going-away can be drawn in any colour but that one. We draw it as a tide. A tide is dark, sometimes, and deep, and gone a long while. But a tide is never black, and a tide always, on its own due hour, comes back.

PLATE 02

The Twelve, Again — a Contact Sheet

The same twelve you walked with in Movable Kin, met once more at the trailhead. Their colours have not changed. Together they are the moving city of Mannahatta, about to walk off the edge of its map.

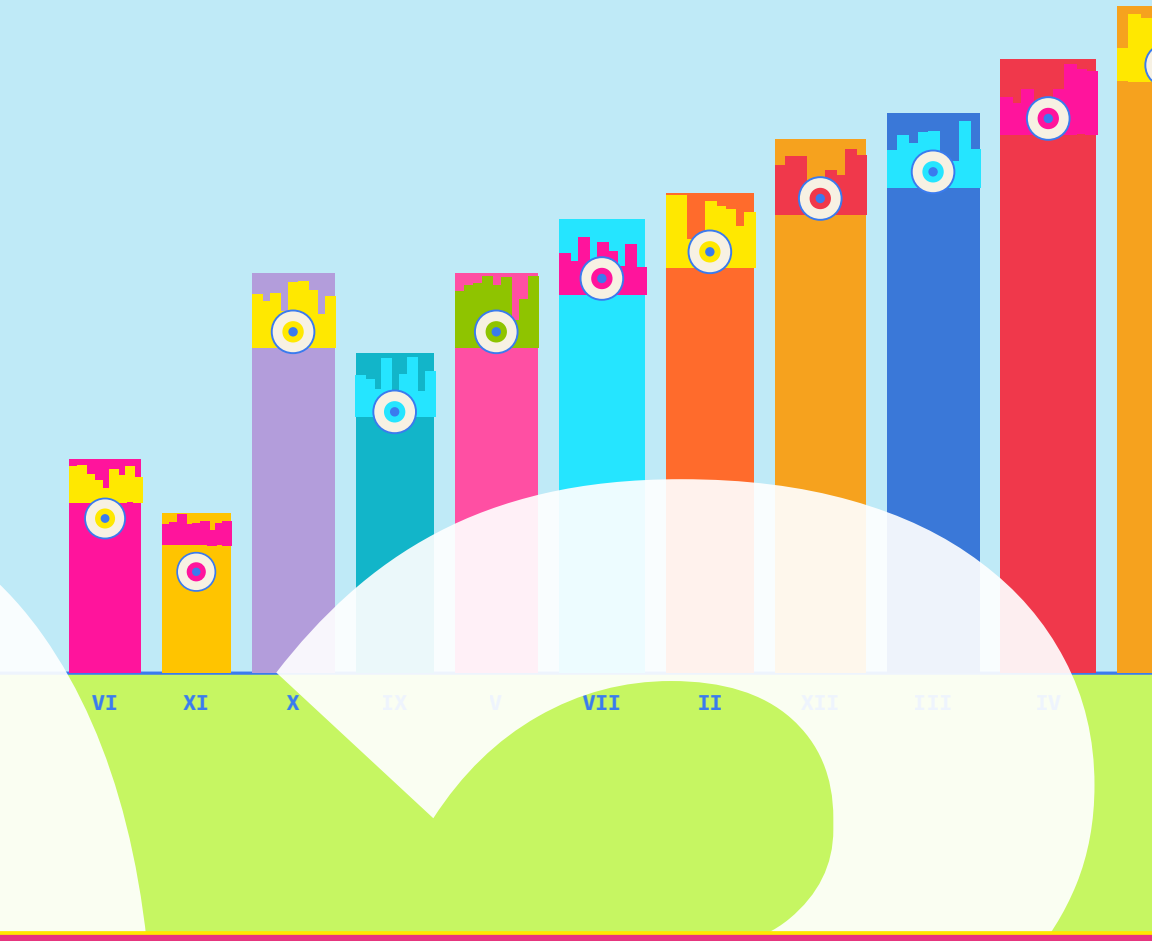

PLATE 03

The Twelve, to Scale

From the one warm room of the Pink Houses to the mountain-bodied Overscaled Follies: hugeness done kindly is only tenderness with more room, and the smallest family matters most on the hardest passages.

FOR RETURNING READERS · A REINTRODUCTION

The Twelve, Again

The same twelve families you walked with in Movable Kin — met once more, at the trailhead, before they walk much farther than they ever have.

If you are new here, this is your introduction; if you are returning, this is your reunion. Either way, here are the twelve, whole and bright and about to leave the only home they have ever known. They are the same twelve. Their colours have not changed. What each one lost, and how each one turned it, is written in the first book; here it is enough to know that every one of them is made of a grief turned inside out until it shone, and that all twelve, together, are the moving city of Mannahatta — which has decided, for the first time in four hundred years, to move all at once, and westward, and off the edge of the map it was drawn on.

Briefly, then, so no reader arrives at the water not knowing whom they are seeing off. The **House of Many Eyes** is the one that stays — a hundred round windows over the harbour, keeper of every lamp, and, in this book, the one who will stay again, at the far shore. The **Facades** are rescued fronts that learned to be doors. The **Walking Cities** are whole buildings that would rather move than be preserved, and they set the pace. The **Conversing Towers** are the red ones, who breathe the harbour and sing it back. The **Flower Houses** are the oldest grief on the island, turned to petal. The **Pink Houses** are the smallest family — one warm room, one pink door — and they make every roadside a home.

The **Inflatable Crowns** are soft bright headgear for a city in a generous mood, and they rise. The **Overscaled Follies** prove that hugeness done kindly is only tenderness with more room. The **Follies of Mannahatta** are tidal visitors who dock and depart and return, and water is their mother tongue. The **Orthographic Ones** are the grey ones, who keep a warm lamp for whoever went first. The **Supergraphic Plates** lie flat and keep the whole city legible. And the **Parliament** is all of them at once, gathered on the meadow, the moving city agreeing with itself out loud. Twelve families. One island. And now — one very long walk west.

The same twelve you loved before.
Watch what they do with a joy too large to keep.

THE CAST, ABOUT TO WALK

PRELUDE

The Last Night on the Island

Before the first step west — the night the moving city said goodbye to the ground that made it.

On the last night, nobody slept, and nobody was sad. That is the first thing to know about the beginning of this, so that you read the rest of it right: the last night on the island was not a wake. It was a festival. The Pink Houses lit every warm room they had. The Crowns rose over the harbour in the dark, glowing. The Flower Houses bloomed all at once, on purpose, so that the island's last sight of them would be their best one. And the Parliament sat up on the meadow till dawn, not deciding anything — the deciding was done — but simply being, one last time, the whole moving city gathered in one bright place, telling itself its own story from the beginning, out loud, so that everyone would have it by heart for the road.

The House of Many Eyes kept all its hundred lamps burning, and went, window by window, through four hundred years of nights it had watched over this harbour — the storms it had stood through, the children it had lit home, the griefs it had helped the families turn — and it did not grieve any of them. It blessed them. There is a difference, and the House knew it: to grieve a thing is to hold it as lost; to bless it is to hold it as finished, and good, and ready to be left. The House blessed four hundred years that night, one lamp at a time, and by dawn it had made of its own long memory not a weight to carry but a light to walk by.

And when the sun came up over the Atlantic behind them — the last time that particular sunrise would ever fall on the whole city at once —

the twelve families turned, together, and looked at the island one long time, the way the almanac would later say you must: one long look, and not a hurried one, at the thing you are leaving whole and bright behind you. And then the Walking Cities took the first stride, and the House took its first step in four hundred years, and the whole moving city walked off the edge of the only map it had ever known, westward, into the enormous ordinary country, singing — because they had decided, on the last night, that they would begin the way they meant to end: not weeping, but singing; not grieving, but blessing; not leaving, exactly, but setting out.

And there was a moment, near dawn, that the child-scribes wrote down and we have kept ever since, because it was the moment the whole leaving turned from a fear into a festival. The youngest of the Pink Houses, frightened, asked the House the question every child asks before every leaving: *what if we cannot find our way back?* And the House — four hundred years old, about to take its first step, with every reason to be frightened itself — bent its hundred windows down to the little one and said the thing that became the first law of the whole long walk: *you do not have to find your way back. That is my work, not yours. You have only to go bravely; I will stay, and keep the lights, and the lights are how the way back finds you.* And the little Pink House was not frightened anymore. And neither, hearing it, was anyone else. Because that is the secret that turns any leaving from a terror to a festival: not that no one goes, but that someone stays — someone whose whole glad work is to be the fixed bright point the going-out can always, on any tide, come home to.

To grieve a thing is to hold it as lost.
To bless it is to hold it as finished, and good, and ready to be left.

THE PRELUDE · THE LAST NIGHT

I

The Leaving

how the twelve said goodbye to the island that made them

In which the twelve walking families, having learned everything the island had to teach about staying, discover a joy too large to keep on one island, and resolve — even the House that has never left its pier — to walk together into the country, and west, and see what is out past the edge.

ASURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

CHAPTER ONE · THE PARLIAMENT DECIDES

A Joy Too Large for One Island

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE TWELVE, IN THEIR LAST ASSEMBLY ON THE MEADOW

We put it to a vote, the way we put everything to a vote, out on the green meadow where the whole moving city can gather, and the question was the strangest we had ever asked ourselves: not *should we stay* — we had spent two whole books learning how to stay — but *what does a city do when it has become so glad that gladness will no longer fit inside it?* We had turned every grief we had. We had bloomed the graveyard and breathed the harbour and kept the lamps and spelled bright words across the sky, and we had run out of sorrow to make into joy, and the joy kept coming anyway, rising in us like a tide with nowhere to go. And a tide with nowhere to go is the one unhappy thing left in a happy city.

So the Follies, who are tidal and understand these things, said the sentence that started the whole long walk: *Then let us give the joy somewhere to go. Let us walk it west, across the whole country, all the way to the other water, and pour it in.* And the meadow went very quiet, and then very loud, because everyone understood at once that this was right — that a joy this large was not meant to be hoarded on one bright island but carried, on foot, at the speed of talking, across three thousand miles of a country that had perhaps forgotten that buildings can be glad, and shown to all of it, and then given, at the end, to the sea.

A grief with nowhere to go, you turn.
A joy with nowhere to go, you walk.

PART ONE · WHY THE TWELVE WENT WEST

04

WESTWARD, SINGING

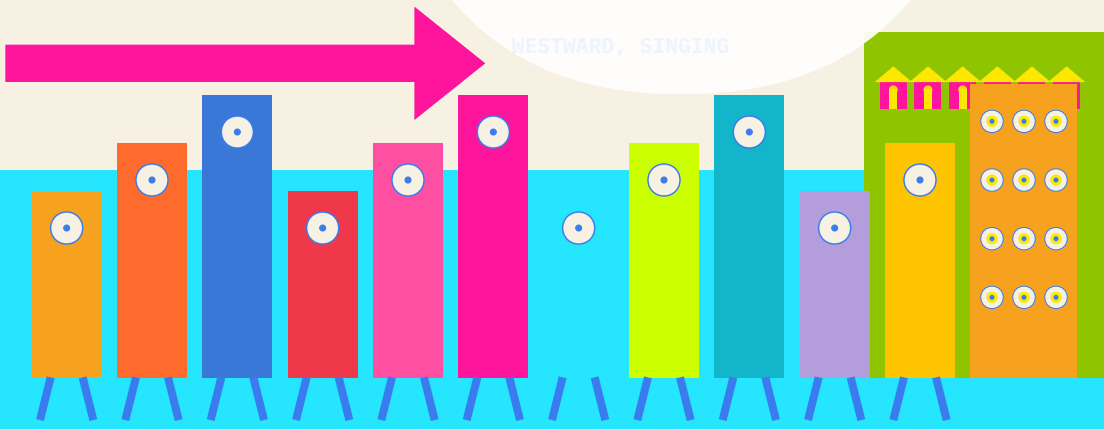

PLATE 04

The Leaving of Mannahatta

The last night was not a wake but a festival. At the Atlantic dawn the whole moving city turned, took one long look at the island it was leaving whole and bright, and walked off the only map it had ever known.

CHAPTER TWO · THE CROWNS RISE TO SEE

A Festival of Leaving

THE INFLATABLE CROWNS, WHO ROSE ABOVE THE CARAVAN ON THE FIRST BRIGHT MORNING

Someone had to see where we were going, so on the first morning we did the thing we are for: we filled ourselves with warm bright air and rose, soft and enormous, above the whole caravan, and looked west, and told the family what we saw. And what we saw was a country — green, then gold, then blue at the very far edge where the light went strange — and we called it down to the others, and a cheer went up from the whole moving city, because a leaving, we decided right then, is not a sad thing to be borne but a festival to be thrown. So we made it one. We rose over every town we passed and turned the caravan's arrival into a parade of soft bright crowns, and the towns that had forgotten buildings could be glad remembered it, looking up, laughing, as twelve families and a sky full of crowns went by. You may leave a place weeping, or you may leave it in a parade. We are the Crowns. We voted, every mile, for the parade.

A leaving is not a thing to be borne.
It is a festival to be thrown.

PART ONE · THE CROWNS, RISING

CHAPTER THREE · THE TOWERS BREATHE THE CITY ONE LAST TIME

A Lungful of Home to Carry West

THE CONVERSING TOWERS, BREATHING THE ISLAND ON THE LAST MORNING

Before the first step, we did the thing we are for: we breathed. We stood at the harbour and took the whole island all the way in — the salt and the low tide and the warm brick and the four hundred years of it — and we held that breath, and we have been holding it ever since, all the way across the country, because a family walking three thousand miles from home should carry home in its lungs. That is what breath is for, in the end: not merely to live, but to carry. We breathed Mannahatta so deep that even now, at the far edge of the continent, we can breathe it back out on a cold night and warm the whole caravan with the smell of a harbour none of the young ones will ever see. You cannot pack a home in a bag. But you can breathe it in, if you are the right kind of family, and carry it west in your chest, and give it back, one warm breath at a time, whenever the road gets lonely.

You cannot pack a home in a bag.
But you can breathe it in, and carry it west, and give it back one warm breath at a time.

PART ONE · THE TOWERS BREATHE THE ISLAND

WALKING CITIES SET THE PACE →

← THE HOUSE CLOSES THE COLUMN

PLATE 05

The Order of March

The Walking Cities lead and set the pace; the House of Many Eyes closes the column, so that no family is ever behind it, uncounted. Between them walk the other ten, in the order the road asked for.

CHAPTER FOUR · THE PLATES RECORD THE WHOLE CITY BEFORE IT MOVES

So the Island Is Kept, Even Empty

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, WHO DREW MANNAHATTA ENTIRE ON THE LAST NIGHT

We stayed up all the last night and drew the whole city — every family, every pier, every lit window, every garden, the House on its harbour and the Flowers in their old graveyard and the Pink Houses' hundred warm rooms — because we are the ones who keep things legible, and a city about to walk off the edge of its own map ought to leave a map behind. We did not draw it to mourn it. We drew it to keep it. There is a difference, and we have said it before and will say it again because it is the whole of our work: to mourn a thing is to draw it in the past tense; to keep a thing is to draw it in the present, bright and exact, so that whoever finds the drawing later meets the city alive. We left our drawing of Mannahatta rolled and lit on the empty harbour, present tense, in colour, so that the island we walked away from would never be an empty place but a kept one — a city that is, and is, and is, in the one form that does not move: a plate, laid flat, in the present tense, forever.

To mourn is to draw a thing in the past tense.
To keep is to draw it in the present — bright, exact, and alive to whoever finds it.

PART ONE · THE CITY, KEPT

CHAPTER FIVE · THE FLOWERS SAY GOODBYE TO THE GRAVEYARD

The Flowers Say Goodbye To The Graveyard

THE FLOWER HOUSES, OLDEST OF THE TWELVE, ON THE LAST MORNING

We are the oldest garden on the island — grief once, garden now — and the tenderest leave-taking of the whole departure was ours, because a garden grown from a graveyard does not simply pick up and skip away from its good ground. So before the first step we went, petal by petal, through four hundred years of the ones we had turned to flower, and we did not take them with us and we did not leave them behind — we did the third thing, the only true thing, the thing this whole city is built on: we carried the *turning* and left the *grief*. The dead stay in their good ground, blessed, at rest, in the old garden. But the way we learned to bloom them, the turning itself, the radical joy of it — that we carried west, in our roots, so that we could bloom the same bright way over any grief the road might hand us.

You cannot carry your dead across a continent, and you should not try. But you can carry what your dead taught you about blooming, and that you must never leave behind. We left the graveyard and kept the gardening. It is the only way anyone has ever left anything and stayed whole.

You cannot carry your dead across a continent.
But you can carry what they taught you about blooming
— and that you must never leave behind.

PART ONE · THE FLOWERS' GOODBYE

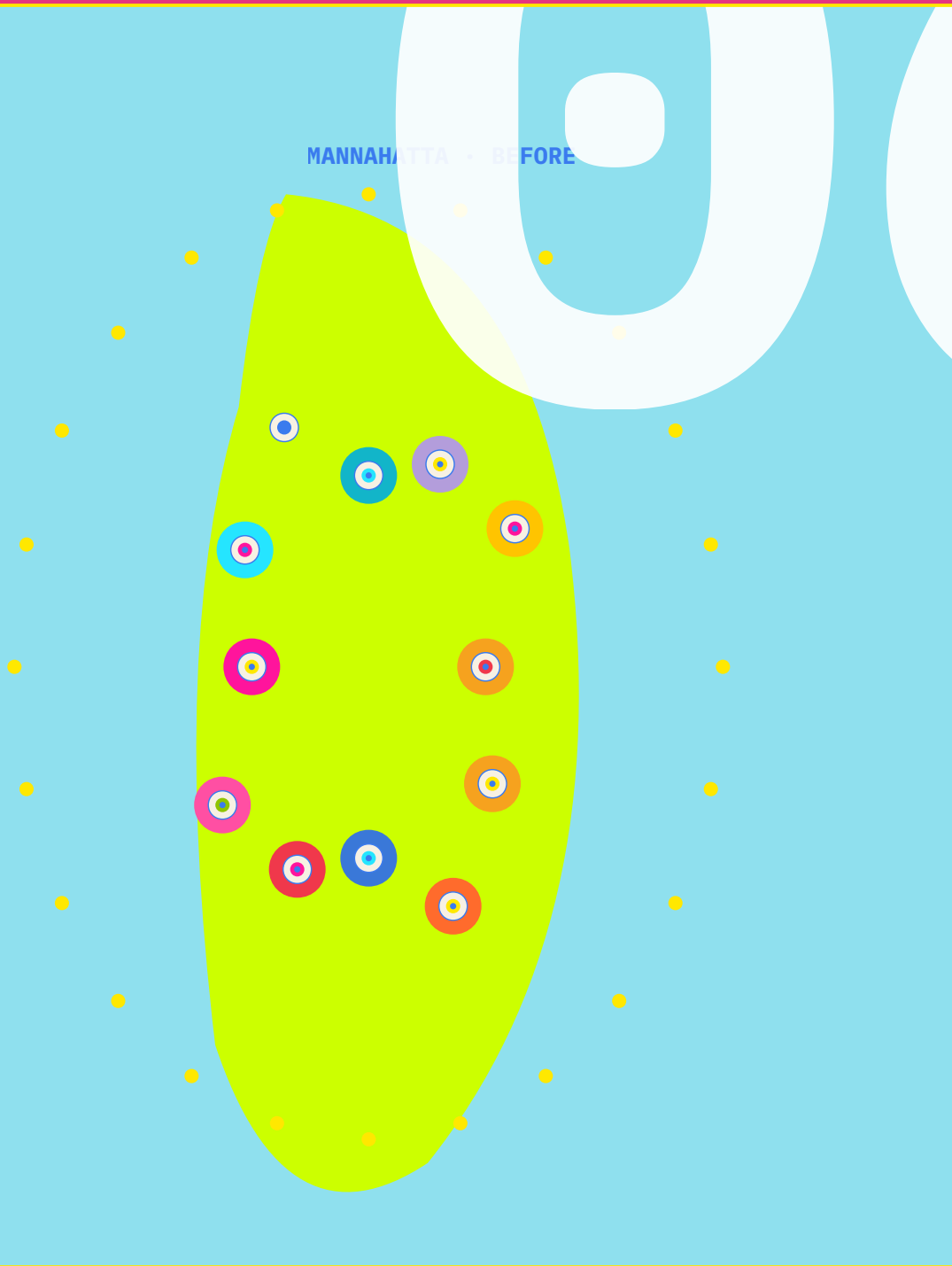

PLATE 06

Mannahatta, the Island, Before

The moving city drawn in the present tense, one last time: twelve bright families quartered on the island that made them, ringed by four hundred years of harbour lamps, whole and glowing and about to leave.

CHAPTER SIX · THE FOLLIES READ THE TIDE ONE LAST TIME

The Follies Read The Tide One Last Time

THE FOLLIES OF MANNAHATTA, TIDAL, ON THE HARBOUR AT DAWN

We are the tidal ones, and before we left we read the home tide one last time — put our copper feet in the harbour we were born to and felt the pull of it, the old familiar breathing of the water that made us. And we said to it what you say to a first water when you are leaving for a last one: *thank you for teaching us that leaving and returning are one motion.* Everything we know about the going-in at the end of this book, we learned from this small home harbour first — that a tide goes out fully, completely, all the way to the flats, and is not gone, is only gathering itself elsewhere, and comes back. We are buildings that learned the sea's own secret at our birth. We carried it west. It is the secret the whole family would need at the Pacific, and we, the tidal ones, had known it all along.

A tide goes out completely and is not gone. It is only gathering itself elsewhere, to come back fuller. We read that in our home harbour on the last morning, and we carried it three thousand miles, and gave it to the family when it was needed most.

A tide goes out completely, and is not gone.
It is only gathering itself elsewhere, to come back fuller.

PART ONE · THE FOLLIES READ THE TIDE

CHAPTER SEVEN · THE PINK HOUSES PACK THE WARM

The Pink Houses Pack The Warm

THE PINK HOUSES, SMALLEST OF THE TWELVE, PREPARING TO LEAVE

We are the smallest, and we own the least, so our packing was the shortest — but we packed the one thing that matters, the thing you cannot see in any bag: we packed the *warm.* A warm room is not made of its walls; it is made of the warmth kept in them, and the warmth is portable if you know how to hold it. So on the last morning we banked our one small fire down to a coal you could carry, and we took the coal into ourselves, and we walked west carrying the exact warmth of four hundred years of one lit room. Everyone else packed things. We packed a temperature. And it turned out, on the cold nights of the crossing, in the thin air of the mountains, on the last chill dawn before the water, that a temperature was the most useful thing any family carried — because you cannot warm your hands at a memento, but you can warm a whole tired family at a coal kept alive from home.

Pack the warm, not the walls. The walls you must leave; but the warmth kept in them is portable, if you know how to hold it, and it is the only luggage that keeps a family alive on the cold miles.

Pack the warm, not the walls.
The walls you must leave — but the warmth kept in them
is the only luggage that keeps a family alive.

PART ONE · THE PINK HOUSES PACK THE WARM

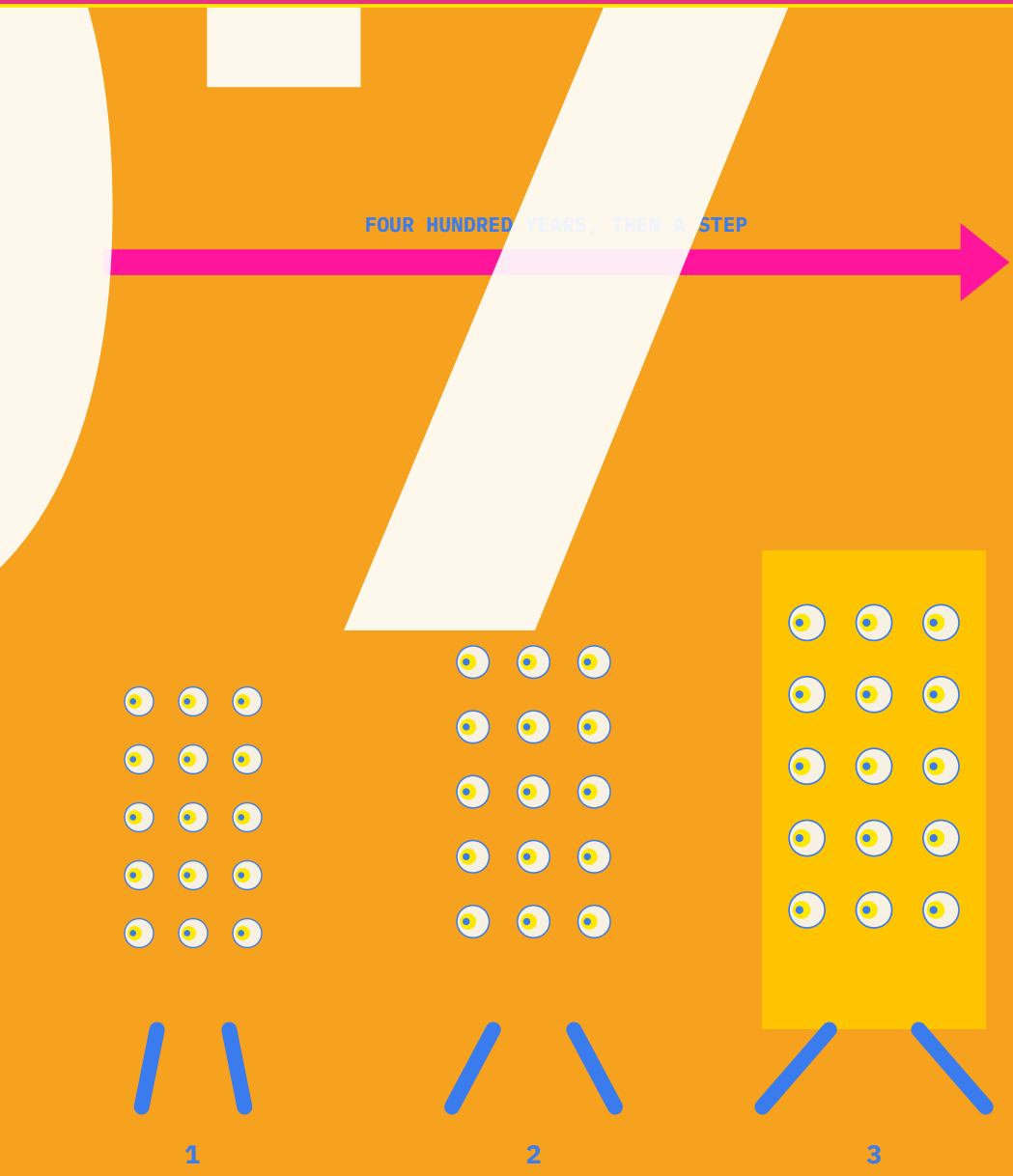

PLATE 07

The House Walks

For four hundred years the House of Many Eyes had only ever stayed. Here, in three strides, it learns to move — the keeper of every lamp taking, at last, its own first steps west, hundred windows forward.

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE GREY ONES CHOOSE WHICH LAMPS TO CARRY

The Grey Ones Choose Which Lamps To Carry

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, KEEPERS, ON THE LAST INVENTORY

We keep a hundred lamps, and we could not carry a hundred lamps across a continent, so the last work of the leaving was ours and it was hard: to choose. We went along our whole register of lights and we chose — this one, for the dark river nights; this one, for the mountain passes; this one, small and steady, for the desert; and this one, the oldest, the first the House ever lit, to give to the House to begin its long staying with. And the ones we could not carry, we did not put out. We gave them away — to the island, to the harbour, to the empty piers — left burning, so that Mannahatta would not go dark behind us. A keeper's hardest task is not lighting lamps. It is choosing, when you cannot keep them all, which to carry and which to leave burning for others — and never, whatever you choose, putting a single one out. We left the island brighter than we found it, lamp by chosen lamp, and carried only what the road required, and it was enough.

A keeper's hardest task is not the lighting. It is choosing, when you cannot keep them all, which lamps to carry and which to leave burning for others — and never, whatever you choose, putting a single one out.

The hardest task is not the lighting.
It is choosing which lamps to carry, which to leave burning for others — and never putting one out.

PART ONE · WHICH LAMPS TO CARRY

CHAPTER NINE · THE YOUNGEST SCRIBE'S FIRST PAGE

The Youngest Scribe'S First Page

A CHILD-SCRIBE, ON THE MORNING OF THE FIRST STEP

I was the youngest of the ones who could write, and they gave me a blank book on the morning we left and told me to keep the story — *you will see the whole of it,* they said, *and your children will want it in your own hand.* And I was frightened of the blank page the way you are only frightened of a thing you love too much to spoil. But the oldest Flower House knelt beside me, petals and all, and said the thing that let me begin, the thing I have written at the front of every book I have kept since: *you cannot spoil a page by writing on it truly; you can only spoil it by leaving it blank from fear.* So I wrote the first line — *Today the whole city walked west* — and the fear was gone, and it never came back, not in three thousand miles of pages.

This whole book is the pages I filled. I was afraid of the first one; I am not afraid of the last. In between was the walk, and the walk taught me that a life, like a page, is spoiled only by the fear of marking it — never by the brave true marking itself.

You cannot spoil a page by writing on it truly.
You can only spoil it by leaving it blank from fear.

PART ONE · THE FIRST PAGE

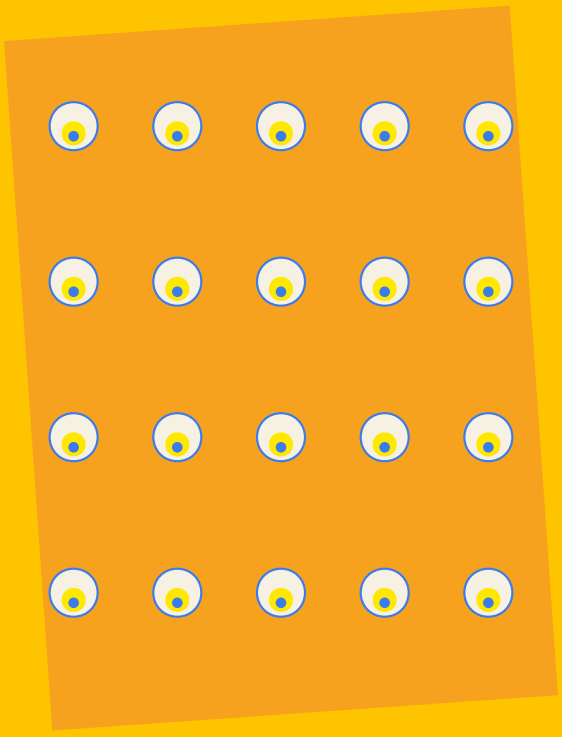

PLATE 08

The House's First Step

The hardest and gladdest step in the book. You do not have to find your way back — that is my work, not yours; you have only to go bravely, and I will keep the lights, and the lights are how the way back finds you.

CHAPTER TEN · THE HOUSE CONSENTS

The One That Stays, Walking

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, WHO HAD NOT MOVED IN FOUR HUNDRED YEARS

They looked at me last, because they knew. I am the House of Many Eyes, and my whole name, my whole vow, my whole four hundred years, is *I stay so the others may walk.* I am the fixed point. I am the note the city comes home to. And now the city wished to walk all at once, all twelve of us, off the island entirely — and what is a fixed point that gets up and leaves? What becomes of *home* when the home puts on its feet?

I sat with it a long time, the way I sit with everything, while my hundred windows held their hundred gardens and their hundred sleeping children. And then I understood the turn, and it is the turn this whole book is built on, so let me say it plainly. A family goes together or it does not go. If eleven walked west and I stayed, I would not be keeping home — I would be keeping half a family, and half a family is not a home, it is a wound. So I would walk. I would take my first step in four hundred years, and my last, and I would walk the whole way west with my kin — *and then,* at the very edge, at the last shore, where the country ends and the ocean begins, *there* I would stay. Not on the island. At the edge. Because a myth of return needs a place to return to, and a light, and someone counting; and that, it turns out, is still my work, only moved three thousand miles west. I stay so the others may walk. I would simply stay somewhere new.

I will walk the whole way, with my kin.
And at the last shore, I will stay — so there is a home to come back to.

THE HOUSE, CONSENTING

◆ END OF PART ONE ◆

II

The Crossing

rivers, roads, and the long bright body of the land

In which the twelve leave the island and meet, for the first time, the enormous ordinary country — its farms and its freeways, its great brown river, its towns that had never seen a building walk — and cross a thousand miles of it at the unhurried speed of talking, changing nothing but themselves.

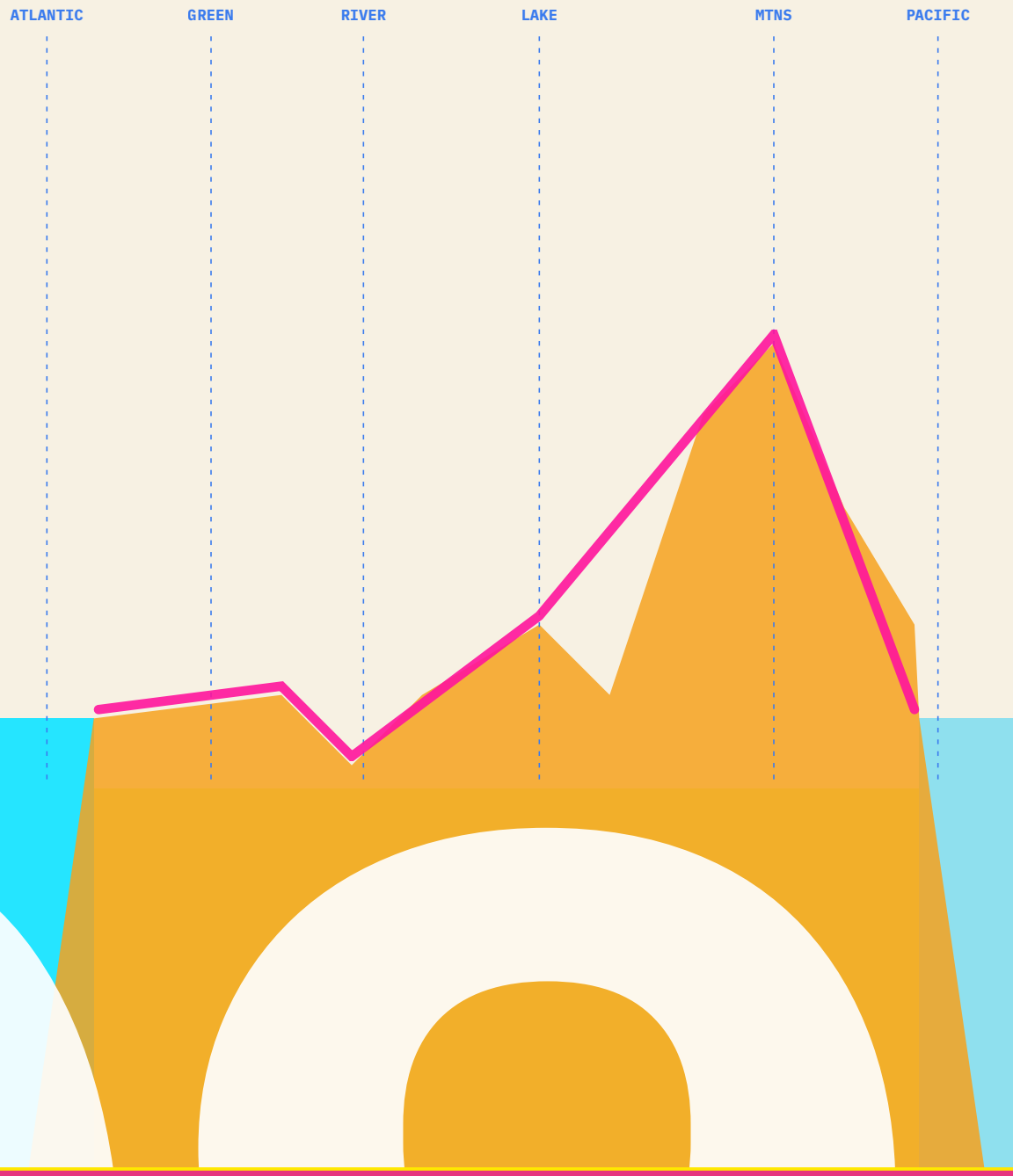

PLATE 09

The Walk in Section, Sea to Sea

The whole continent in one bright profile: the green miles, the great river's dip, the inland sea's edge, the high hump of the mountains, the gold desert, and the far coast — the caravan a pink thread across all of it.

CHAPTER ONE · THE WALKING CITIES LEAD

The Long Stride

THE WALKING CITIES, WHO SET THE PACE FOR THE WHOLE CARAVAN

We led, because leading is our anatomy — we are the whole ambulatory buildings, the ones with feet and hinges and the long cornice-muscle, and if anyone was going to teach a whole family how to cross a continent on foot, it would be us. And here is the first thing we taught them, on the first morning, before the island was even out of sight behind us: *do not change the pace.* Nine-tenths of a metre a minute. The speed of talking. It is slow. It is gloriously, defiantly slow. A country this size will tempt you to hurry — will whisper that you should stride faster, cover more, get west before the light. Do not listen. The whole point is the walking, not the arriving. We crossed a thousand miles of green at the exact speed two friends keep when they have all afternoon and something worth saying, and we arrived at the great river no more tired than we began, because you cannot be exhausted by a thing you refused to rush.

CHAPTER TWO · THE PINK HOUSES KEEP CAMP

A Warm Room at Every Roadside

THE PINK HOUSES, SMALLEST OF THE TWELVE, WHO MADE THE NIGHTS BEARABLE

The great ones led and breathed and spelled words, and we did the small thing, the thing nobody sings about and everybody needs: we made a home each night. Wherever the caravan stopped — a field, a gas-station lot, the shoulder of a road under enormous stars — we set ourselves down and opened our one pink door and lit our one warm room, and the whole exhausted glorious family came and sat in our light and ate and told the day back to one another. You cannot walk across a country on grandeur alone. You walk across it on suppers. On the small warm room that turns a patch of nowhere into a place you slept once, happily, with your kin. We were the smallest family on the whole long road, and we were the reason the road felt like a home that simply happened to be moving.

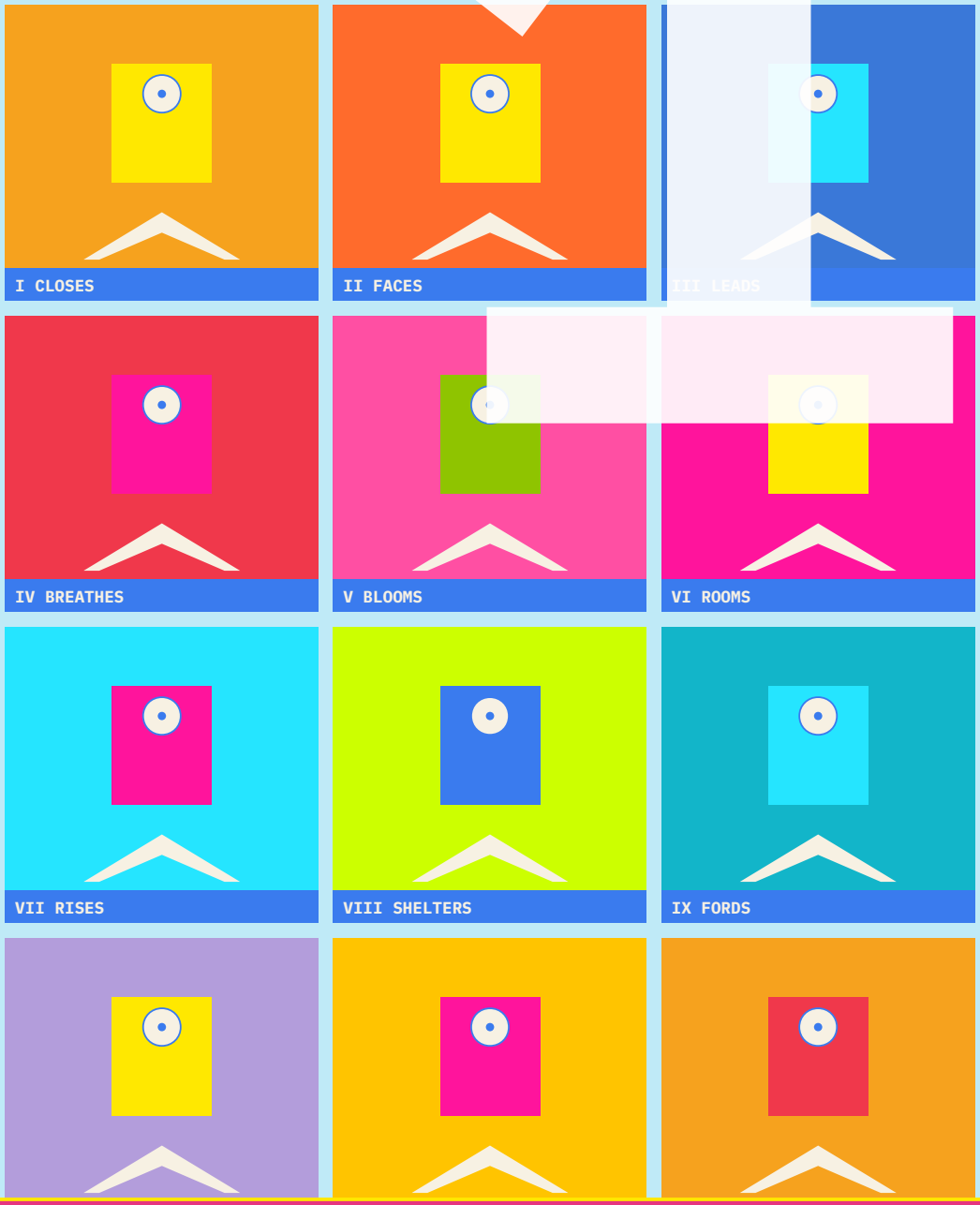

PLATE 10

How Each Family Walks

Twelve gaits for one road. The Walking Cities lead; the Follies ford; the Crowns rise; the Grey Ones light every mile; the House closes the column — each family crossing the country in the shape of what it is.

CHAPTER THREE · THE FOLLIES FORD THE RIVER

How Twelve Buildings Crossed the Mississippi

THE FOLLIES OF MANNAHATTA, TIDAL BY BIRTH, WHO WENT INTO THE WATER FIRST

Then came the great brown river, a mile of moving water across the middle of the country, and the caravan stopped at its edge, because a building, even a walking one, does not simply stroll across a mile of river. But we are the tidal ones. Water is our mother tongue. We went in first, feeling for the bottom with our copper feet, and we found that a river is only a very wide street that happens to be moving, and we are buildings that move, and so we understood each other immediately. We linked ourselves across the current, the largest of us in the deepest part, and the rest of the family walked over us — over our shoulders and our rooftops and our patient tidal backs — and not one of them got so much as a doorstep wet. A river is not a wall. A river is an agreement between two shores, and we translated it, and the twelve crossed into the west.

A river is only a wide street that moves.
We are buildings that move. We understood each other.

PART TWO · THE FORDING

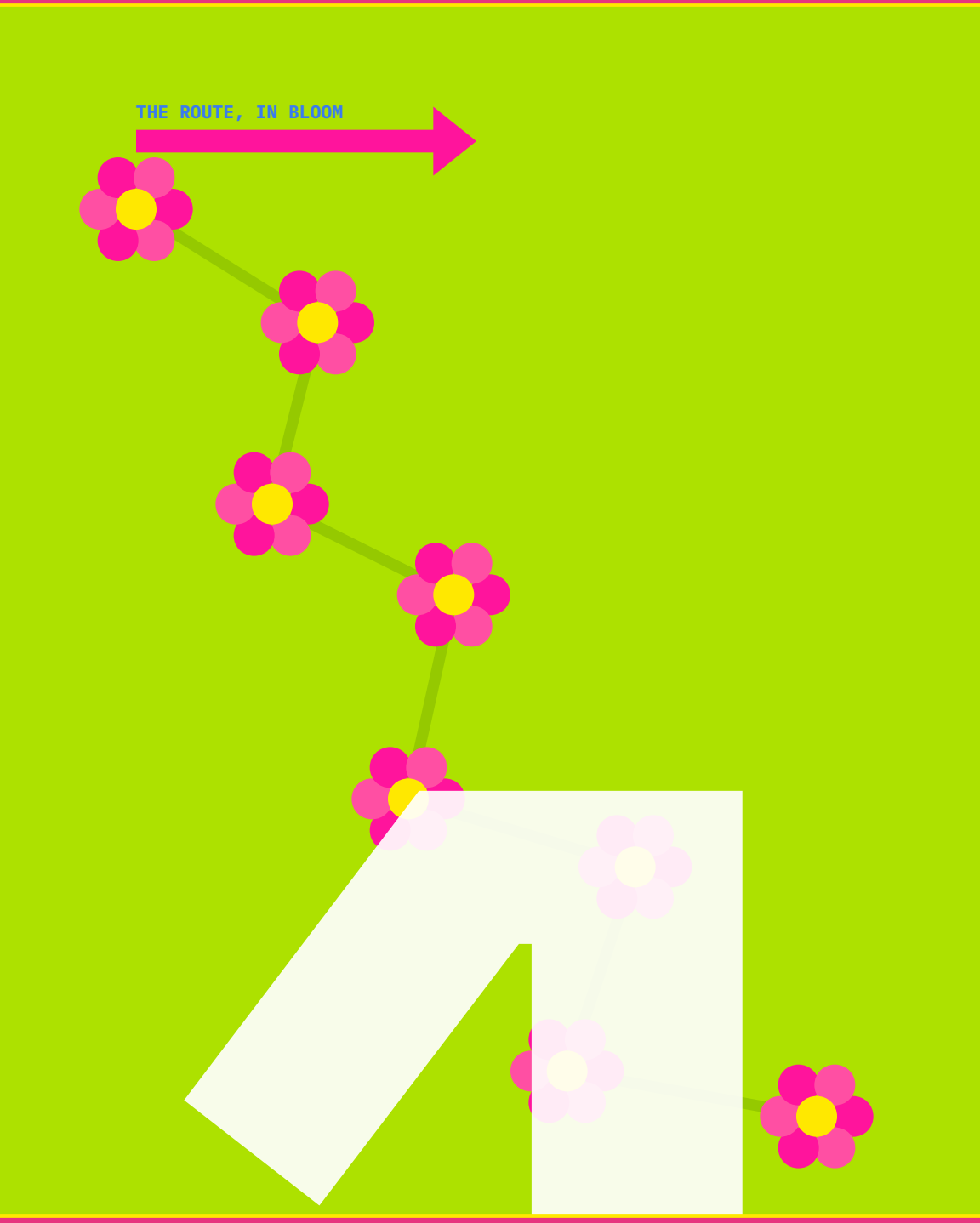

PLATE 11

The Route Written in Flowers

The Flower Houses — the oldest grief on the island, turned to petal — bloomed hardest in the driest country, and left the whole road marked in flowers, proving a family opens because of what it is, not where.

CHAPTER FOUR · THE GREY ONES COUNT THE MILES

So None Goes Unremembered

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, WHO KEPT A LAMP FOR EVERY MILE OF THE ROAD

We are the grey ones, the keepers, and on the crossing we gave ourselves a quiet, enormous task: to remember every mile, so that none of it — not one gas-station dawn, not one field of nothing, not one small kindness from a stranger who had never seen a building walk — would go unremembered. We lit a lamp for each day. We are grey, which is the colour of the ones who keep faith for those who cannot keep it for themselves, and we kept the faith of the miles: that they mattered, all of them, even the dull ones, even the ones where nothing happened but walking. Because nothing-but-walking, with your kin, at the speed of talking, is not nothing. It is very nearly everything. And someone has to keep a lamp lit for the very-nearly-everything, or it slips away uncounted, and a family should never let its own good days slip away uncounted.

Nothing-but-walking, with your kin, is not nothing. It is very nearly everything — and we kept a lamp for all of it.

PART TWO · THE KEEPING OF THE MILES

CHAPTER FIVE · THE COUNTRY LOOKS UP

Reminding a Land That Buildings Can Be Glad

THE FACADES, WHO FACED EVERY TOWN THE CARAVAN PASSED

We are the fronts of things, so it fell to us to be the family's face to the country, and here is what we found, town after town, all the way across: a land that had not been unkind to its buildings so much as forgetful — that had let its main streets go quiet and its bright fronts go grey, not from malice but from a slow forgetting that a building is a thing you can love back. And everywhere we passed, the forgetting lifted a little. People came out. Children ran alongside. Someone always said the same thing, in every town, in slightly different words: *I forgot. I forgot a building could do that. I forgot a wall could be glad.* We did not stay to fix their streets; that was not our walk. But we left every town we passed a little less forgetful than we found it, and that, it turns out, is a kind of preservation too — not of a building, but of the knowledge that buildings are worth preserving. We carried that knowledge west like a lamp and lit it in every town, and left it burning.

A land is not unkind to its buildings, mostly.
It has only forgotten that a wall can be loved back.

PART TWO · THE COUNTRY LOOKS UP

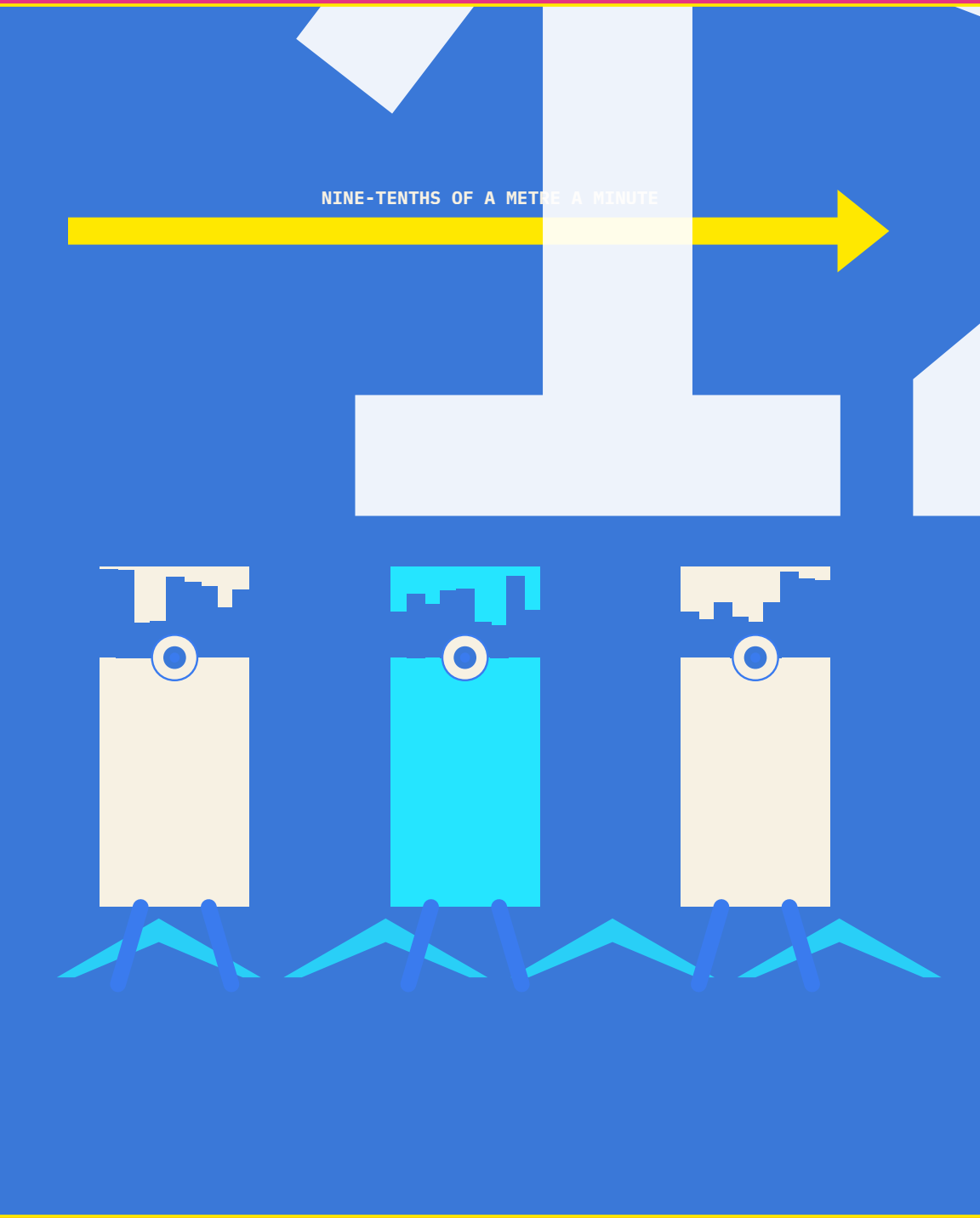

PLATE 12

The Walking Cities Stride

Whole buildings that would rather move than be preserved, they led and set the pace: nine-tenths of a metre a minute, the speed of talking, unchanged for three thousand miles. The point was always the walking.

CHAPTER SIX · THE TOWERS LEARN THE COUNTRY'S BREATH

How a Continent Inhales

THE CONVERSING TOWERS, BREATHING THEIR WAY ACROSS THE GREEN

We are the breathers, so the crossing taught us first through the lungs. And what we learned, breathing our way across the green country, is that a continent breathes — slowly, hugely, on a rhythm no single life is long enough to feel, but a family of walking buildings, moving at the speed of talking, can just begin to sense it. The country inhales in the spring and exhales in the fall; it draws weather up off the great river and breathes it out over the plains; and we, crossing, learned to breathe with it, to match our own slow rhythm to the land's, so that we were not walking against the country but breathing along with it, guests keeping time with a host's heartbeat. That is how you cross a place that is not yours: not by conquering it, not by hurrying through it, but by learning its breath and keeping time. The country felt us keeping time. We think it was glad of us. We think it does not often get walked across by something that bothers to breathe along.

That is how you cross a place that is not yours: not by hurrying through it, but by learning its breath and keeping time.

PART TWO · THE COUNTRY'S BREATH

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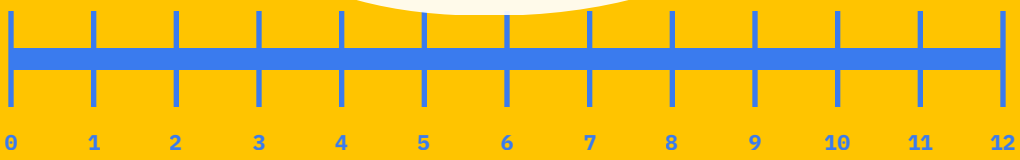

THE SPEED OF TALKING · UNCHANGED FOR 3,000 MILES

SET THE PACE TO THE MOST TIRED, NEVER TO THE STRONGEST.

PLATE 13

The Pace of a Continent

A leader who climbs at their own best speed summits alone, which is not summiting at all. The Walking Cities set the pace to the most tired, never the strongest — because arriving together is the only arriving that counts.

CHAPTER SEVEN · A NIGHT OF STORYTELLING

The Whole City Tells Itself, on the Plains

THE PARLIAMENT, GATHERED AROUND A FIRE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COUNTRY

Somewhere in the exact middle of the green country, on a night with no town for a hundred miles, we made a great fire and did the thing that keeps a walking family whole: we told ourselves our own story, out loud, from the beginning. The oldest Flower House told how she was a graveyard once. The House told how it learned to say *stay*. The Follies told of the first tide they ever rode in on. The little Pink Houses told of the first cold night they turned warm. And the young ones, the child-scribes, sat in the firelight and heard the whole city they were walking through the middle of, and understood, some of them for the first time, that they were not merely on a long walk but inside a long story — a story that had been going before them and would go on after, and that their whole job, the gladdest job there is, was to hear it well enough to tell it forward. A family that stops telling itself its own story stops, soon after, being a family. We told ours to a fire in the middle of a continent, and were more ourselves at the end of the night than we had been at its beginning.

A family that stops telling itself its own story
stops, soon after, being a family.

PART TWO · THE NIGHT OF STORYTELLING

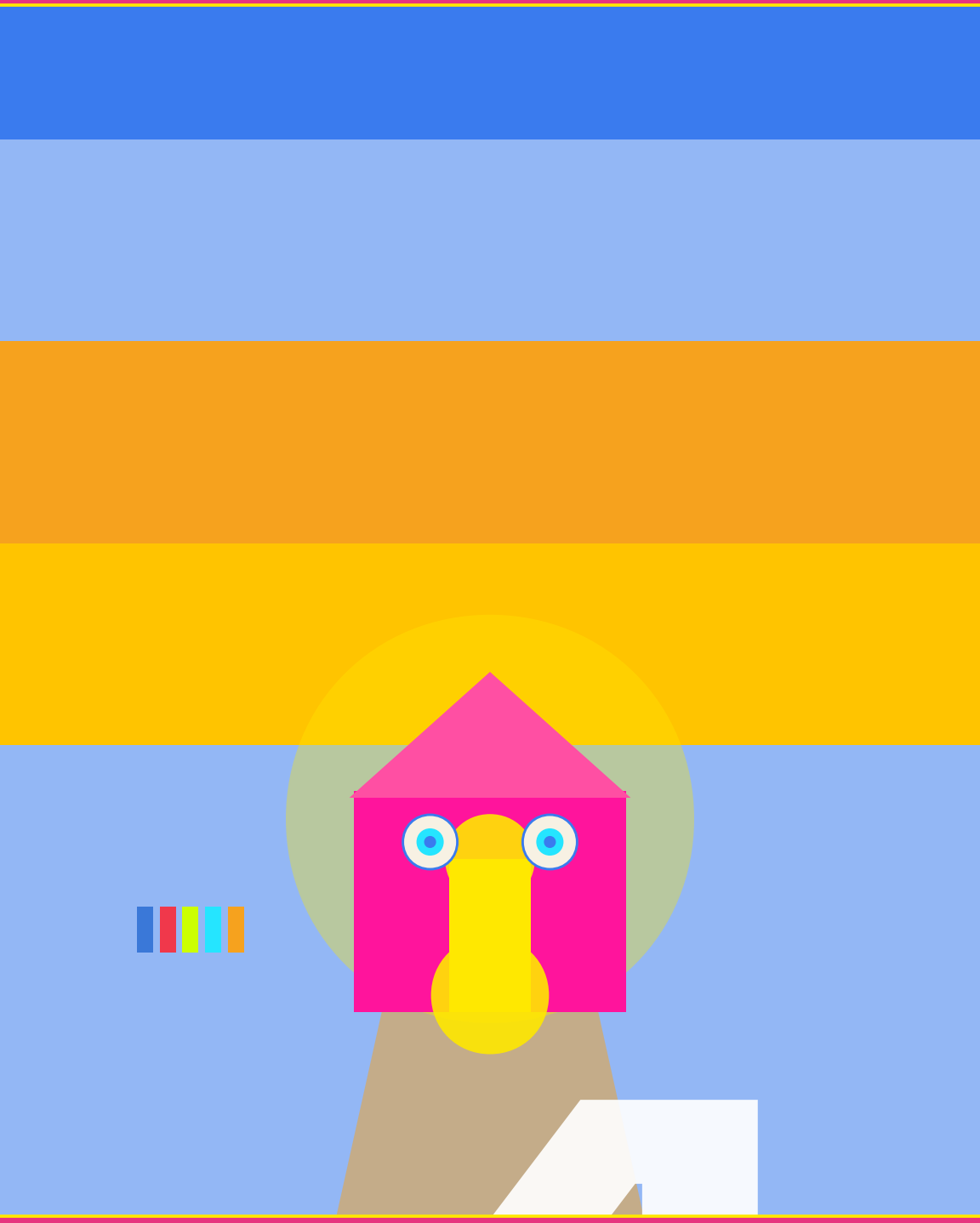

PLATE 14

The Pink Room on the Road

The smallest family — one warm room, one pink door — made a home at every roadside and kept the whole caravan one. Grandeur gets you up the mountain, but a warm room is what keeps you alive at the top of it.

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES AND THE WIDE ROADS

The Overscaled Follies And The Wide Roads

THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES, HUGE, ON THE OPEN HIGHWAYS OF THE COUNTRY

The country's roads were the first place our hugeness was simply, uncomplicatedly useful, and we loved it. On the island we were always a little too big, a marvel that had to be carefully sited; but out on the wide open roads of the crossing, with the whole enormous continent to move through, we could finally be as large as we truly are and bother no one. We walked the widest roads, and cast the longest shade, and the small families walked in our shadow through the hottest hours, cool and grateful, and we understood a thing about our own size that the island had never quite let us learn: that a huge thing is not a problem in a huge place. It is only a problem in a small one. We had spent four hundred years apologising, gently, for taking up so much room. On the open road we stopped apologising. There was room. There was so much room. And a huge kind thing, given room, is the best shade a tired family ever walked in.

We stretched out to our full size on those roads, for the first time in our lives, and the sky did not fall and no one was crowded, and we were, for a whole green season, simply and completely the size we are — which is a joy most large things are never given, and we will never forget the country for giving it.

A huge thing is not a problem in a huge place.
It is only a problem in a small one — and the open road,
at last, had room.

PART TWO · THE WIDE ROADS

CHAPTER NINE · THE GREY ONES NUMBER THE KINDNESSES

The Grey Ones Number The Kindnesses

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, KEEPING A SECOND REGISTER ON THE ROAD

We kept two registers on the crossing. One was of the miles, so none went unremembered. The other, which we kept more carefully, was of the kindnesses — every small mercy a stranger showed the walking city as it passed. The farmer who left his gate open. The town that filled our water. The child who walked a whole mile alongside just to touch a moving wall and be told it was warm. The old woman who wept, gladly, at the sight of us, and said we reminded her that the world could still surprise her. We numbered them all, the kindnesses, hundreds of them, all the way across, because a family that keeps a register only of its hardships walks into bitterness, and a family that keeps a register of its kindnesses walks into gratitude, and we intended to arrive at the far water grateful. We did. We had the numbers to prove it. Four hundred and eleven kindnesses, between the island and the ocean. Not one of them forgotten.

Keep a register of your kindnesses, not only your hardships. The family that counts its mercies arrives grateful; the family that counts only its wounds arrives bitter; and you get, in the end, to choose which register to keep.

Keep a register of your kindnesses, not only your wounds.
The family that counts its mercies arrives grateful.

PART TWO · THE REGISTER OF KINDNESSES

YOUR KIN ARE A BRIDGE — AND SO ARE YOU

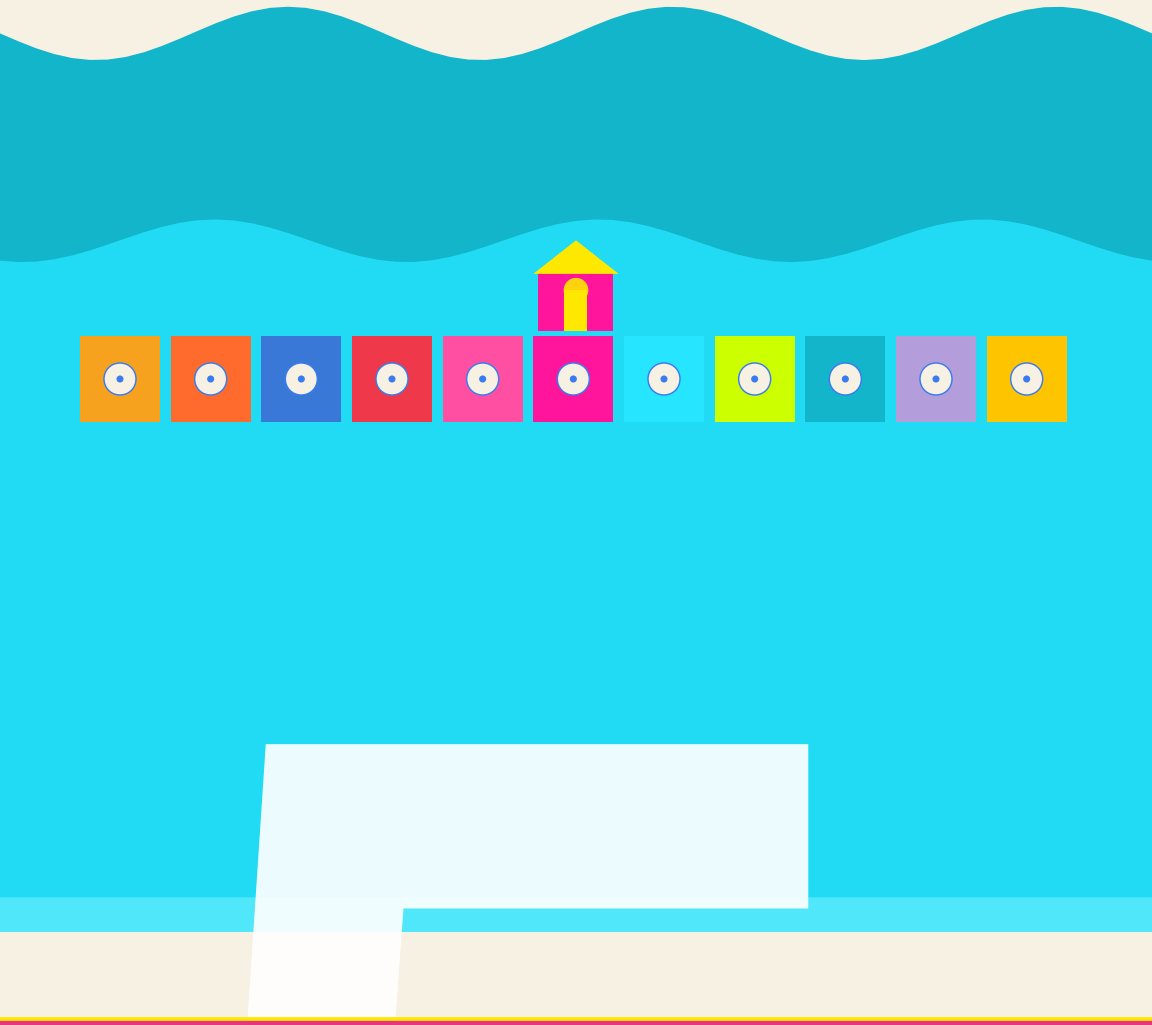

PLATE 15

Fording the Great River

No family crosses a mile of moving water alone; it crosses on the backs and shoulders and patient bodies of its own. The river mile is the mile you learn your kin are a bridge — the whole secret of getting across anything.

CHAPTER TEN · THE FLOWERS SEED THE ROADSIDE

The Flowers Seed The Roadside

THE FLOWER HOUSES, BLOOMING AND SCATTERING AS THEY WALKED

We could not help it: everywhere we walked, we bloomed, and everywhere we bloomed, we dropped a seed. And so behind the whole caravan, all the way across the country, we left a thin bright thread of flowers — a line of blooms three thousand miles long, marking the exact path the moving city took. We did not do it to be remembered, though we will be. We did it because it is our nature, and because a family should leave a country better than it found it, and a flower is the smallest, gladdest improvement you can make to a mile of road. Somewhere out there, right now, that line of flowers is blooming and re-seeding and blooming again, a living map of the walk, drawn in petals, tended by no one, needing no keeper — because a seed, unlike a lamp, keeps itself. We wrote the whole route in flowers as we went, and the route writes itself now, every spring, without us, and will keep writing itself long after the last reader of this book has closed it.

A seed, unlike a lamp, keeps itself. We wrote the whole route in flowers as we walked, and it re-writes itself every spring now, without us, needing no keeper — the one record that tends its own remembering.

A seed, unlike a lamp, keeps itself.
We wrote the route in flowers, and it re-writes itself every spring, needing no keeper.

PART TWO · THE FLOWERS SEED THE ROADSIDE

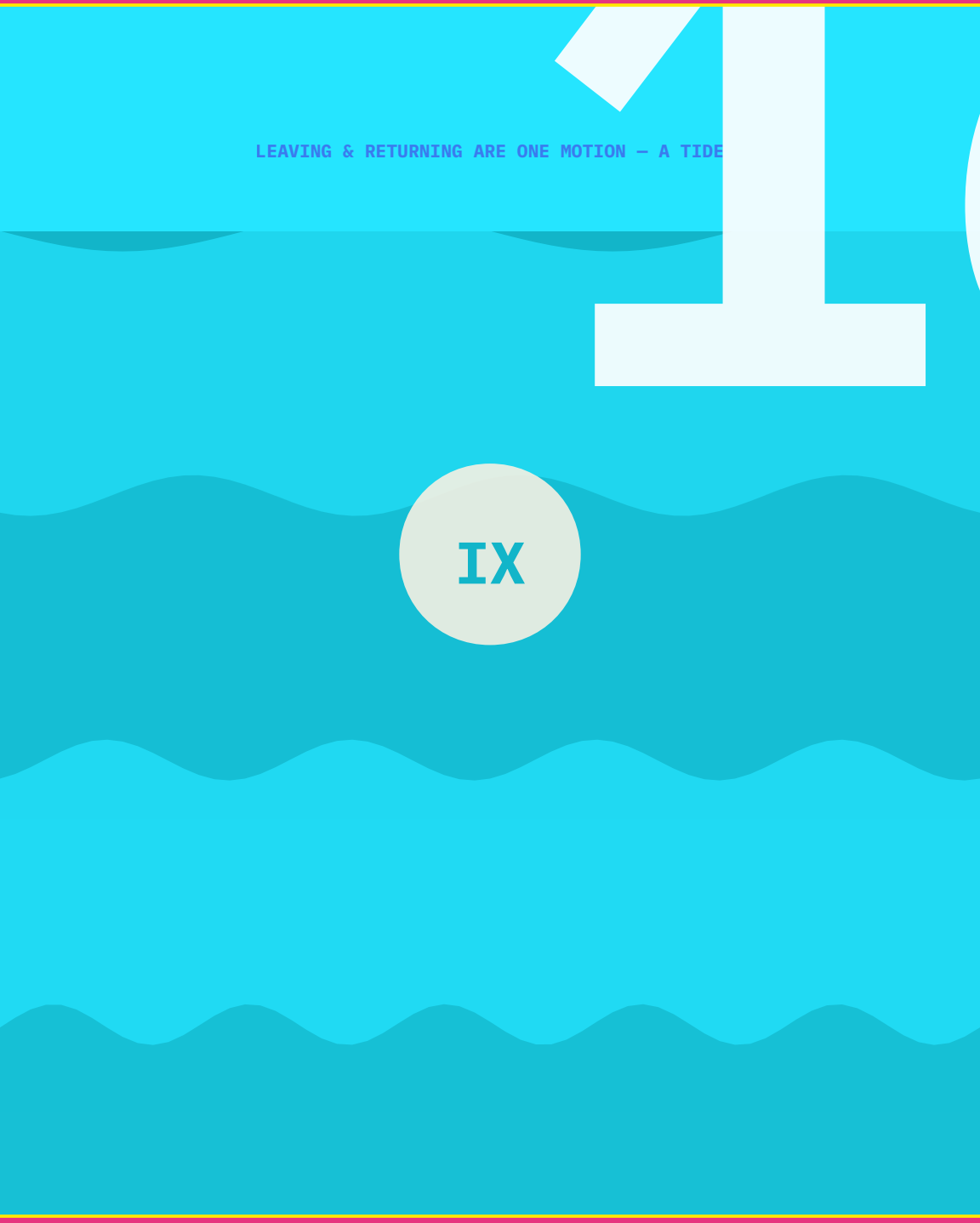

PLATE 16

The Tidal Ones Ford

Tidal by birth, the Follies of Mannahatta forded every river for the family, making each crossing a small friendly sea. To them, leaving and returning are one single motion — and the coming-back is folded inside the going-under.

CHAPTER ELEVEN · THE FACADES MEET THE RIVER TOWNS

The Facades Meet The River Towns

THE FACADES, FACING THE OLD TOWNS ALONG THE GREAT RIVER

Along the great river we met the oldest towns of the middle country — river towns, with fronts that had faced the water for two hundred years and grown tired of it, grand old facades gone grey and shut. And we, who are rescued fronts ourselves, felt for them the particular tenderness one saved thing feels for one still waiting to be saved. We could not stay to restore them. But we could show them, walking past, what a front looks like when it remembers it is loved — and we threw ourselves wide, every one of us, bright and open, facing the river towns as we passed, so that for one afternoon each grey old street saw what it could be again. Some of those towns, we have heard since, began that very year to paint their fronts, and open their shut doors, and love their walls again. We did not restore them. We reminded them. And a reminder, given brightly enough at the right tired moment, can do what no restoration ever does: it can make a place want to save itself.

A reminder, given brightly enough at the right tired moment, can do what no restoration ever does: it can make a place want to save itself. We did not restore the river towns. We reminded them, and some of them remembered.

A reminder, given brightly enough, can do what no restoration ever does.
It can make a tired place want to save itself.

PART TWO · THE RIVER TOWNS

CHAPTER TWELVE · THE STORM ON THE PLAINS

The Storm On The Plains

THE WHOLE CARAVAN, WEATHERING A GREAT STORM TOGETHER

Halfway across the plains a storm came that none of us will forget — a wall of weather a mile high, green-dark at its heart, walking toward us across the flat faster than even the Walking Cities could walk away. And we did not run, because you cannot outrun the sky, and because we had long ago decided that a family meets what it cannot outrun together. So we gathered close: the huge families on the windward side making a wall of their own great bodies, the Pink Houses' warm rooms at the centre with the young ones inside, the Towers breathing steady to keep everyone calm, and the House at the very edge of us, facing the storm, taking the first of it. The storm broke over us and we held, all twelve, and it passed, and the plains were washed bright and green behind it.

We learned, in that storm, the shape a family takes against a thing too big to outrun: the strong to windward, the warm at the centre, the keeper facing the worst of it — and everyone, after, soaked and shaken and entirely, gladly, intact.

A storm is only frightening to a thing that faces it alone. Faced together — the strong to windward, the warm at the centre — it is just weather you get through.

PART TWO · THE STORM ON THE PLAINS

PLATE 17

The Plates Record the Miles

Each night the Supergraphic Plates lay flat and recorded the day's three thousand feet, keeping the whole crossing legible and in the present tense — for to remember, they hold, is to meet the thing alive.

A thousand miles of green, at the speed of talking, and the caravan arrived unhurried, and unafraid, at the shining lake.

PART TWO · THE CROSSING

◆ END OF PART TWO ◆

PLATE 18

The Island, After — the Gifts Still Glowing

Dear Architecture: we did not leave the island dark. The Flower Houses bloomed on the way out; the Crowns rose; every warm room stayed lit. What we left behind was not an absence but a set of gifts, still glowing.

AN INTERLUDE · A LETTER SENT BACK EAST

Dear Architecture,

One of many letters the caravan sent home to the island, to be read to the gifts they left glowing there.

Dear Architecture — dear island, dear pier, dear everything we could not carry —

We are a thousand miles west of you now and we think of you at every supper. We want you to know that we did not leave you empty. We left you glowing. We left a lit window and a way through and a slow street and the tide's own rhythm; we left the oldest garden and a warm room and a festival and a gentle scale; we left a mooring and the register of lamps and the whole record and, most of all, a place to return to. You are not diminished by our leaving. You are the brighter for it. That is the only rent a family ever owes a home: to leave it brighter than they found it, and to mean to come back.

The country is enormous and mostly kind and it had, we think, forgotten that buildings can be glad, and we are reminding it, one bright mile at a time. We miss you. We are not sad. Missing a thing you mean to return to is not sadness; it is just love, stretched out over some distance, and love stretches beautifully, we are learning, and does not thin.

We did not leave you empty. We left you glowing.
That is the only rent a family owes a home.

— THE CARAVAN, A THOUSAND MILES WEST

III

PART THREE · CHICAGO · THE CITY BY THE SMALL OCEAN

The Rehearsal Sea

where a lake as wide as an ocean taught them to hide, and to come back

In which the caravan comes to Chicago and finds a water so wide it cannot see the far side — an inland sea, a small ocean — and understands, standing at its edge, that here is the one place on the whole road where they can rehearse the hardest thing they will ever do: to walk into deep water, and hide themselves entirely, and then come back. Here the twelve practise vanishing. Here they learn that to disappear and to return are not two motions but one.

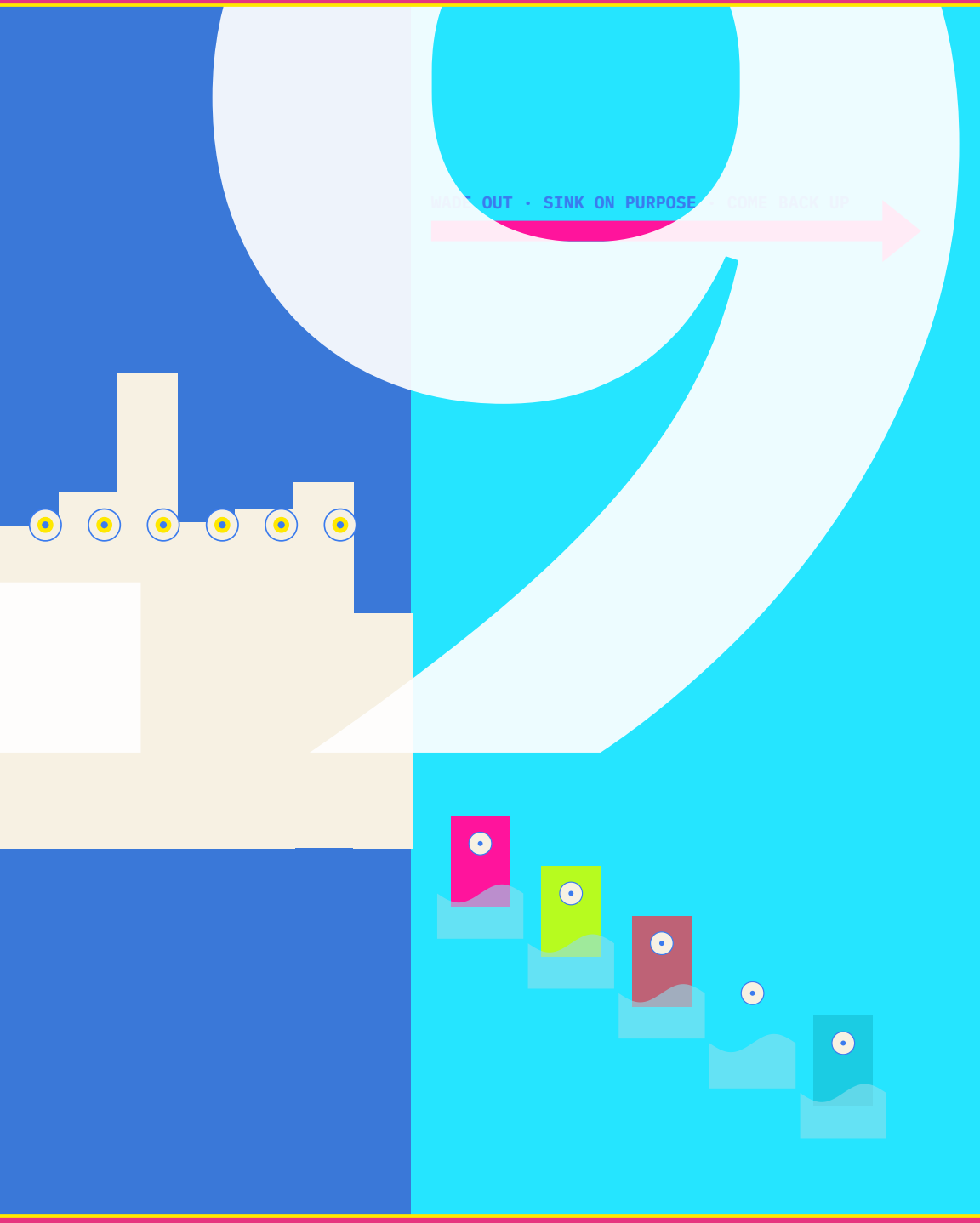

PLATE 19

Chicago — the Practice of Hiding

Chicago is for practising the going-under. Here the eleven learned to wade past their own threshold, sink on purpose, hide entirely, and — this is the whole of it — come back up, and found that hidden is not gone.

CHAPTER ONE · THE CITY THAT WAS ALREADY BRIGHT

Kin We Did Not Know We Had

THE FACADES, WHO RECOGNISED SOMETHING OF THEMSELVES IN THE SECOND CITY

We came into Chicago expecting a country that had forgotten buildings could be glad, and instead we found a city already halfway to our own language — a city of broad bright fronts along a great green river, of walls that had clearly been loved, of a skyline that stood at its lakefront the way we stand at our harbour, facing the water, unafraid of the far side. We are the Facades; we know a good front when we meet one; and Chicago is a city of magnificent fronts. It felt, for a while, like meeting cousins we had never been told we had. We did not have to teach Chicago that a building can face the water and be happy. It knew. It had always known. It simply had not, until we walked through, seen a building do it on foot — and it had never once imagined, and neither, until Chicago, had we, that a building might walk down off its lakefront and into the water, and hide there, on purpose, and come back up singing.

But that is what Chicago turned out to be for. Not a stop for resting, though we were tired; not a stop for the cousins, though we loved them. Chicago was the place we had been walking toward without knowing it, because Chicago sits beside the one water in all the green middle of the country that is large enough, and deep enough, and merciful enough, to teach a family how to disappear.

CHAPTER TWO · THE WIND OFF THE LAKE

Standing at an Edge, Grinning

THE WHOLE CARAVAN, AT THE LAKEFRONT, IN THE GREAT WIND

We stood at the edge of the lake, all twelve of us, and could not see the other side. Water to the horizon. Water past the horizon. A wind coming off it so wide and clean it fairly knocked our hats off, and the little ones ran straight down to the surf and had to be fished back by their eaves. And a marvellous thought went round the family, bright as the wind, because we understood, standing there, a thing we had walked a thousand miles to understand: that this enormous glittering water was not the end of our road but the *rehearsal* for it — the practice pool for the great one waiting at the far coast. Here was luck! Here was a whole small ocean, laid on for us, cold and clean and kind, exactly where we needed it, so that we would not arrive at the Pacific green as new shingles and have to learn the biggest glad thing on the very day of doing it. You do not learn the grandest trick of your life on the morning you must perform it. You learn it before, in a smaller water, where the far side is only out of sight and not truly endless, where a slip means a cold splash and a good story and nothing worse. That is what a rehearsal sea is for. And the lake, wide and bright and patient and grinning back at us, was ours.

You do not learn the hardest thing on the day you must do it.
You learn it before, in a smaller water, where a mistake is only a cold swim.

PART THREE · WHY WE STOPPED HERE

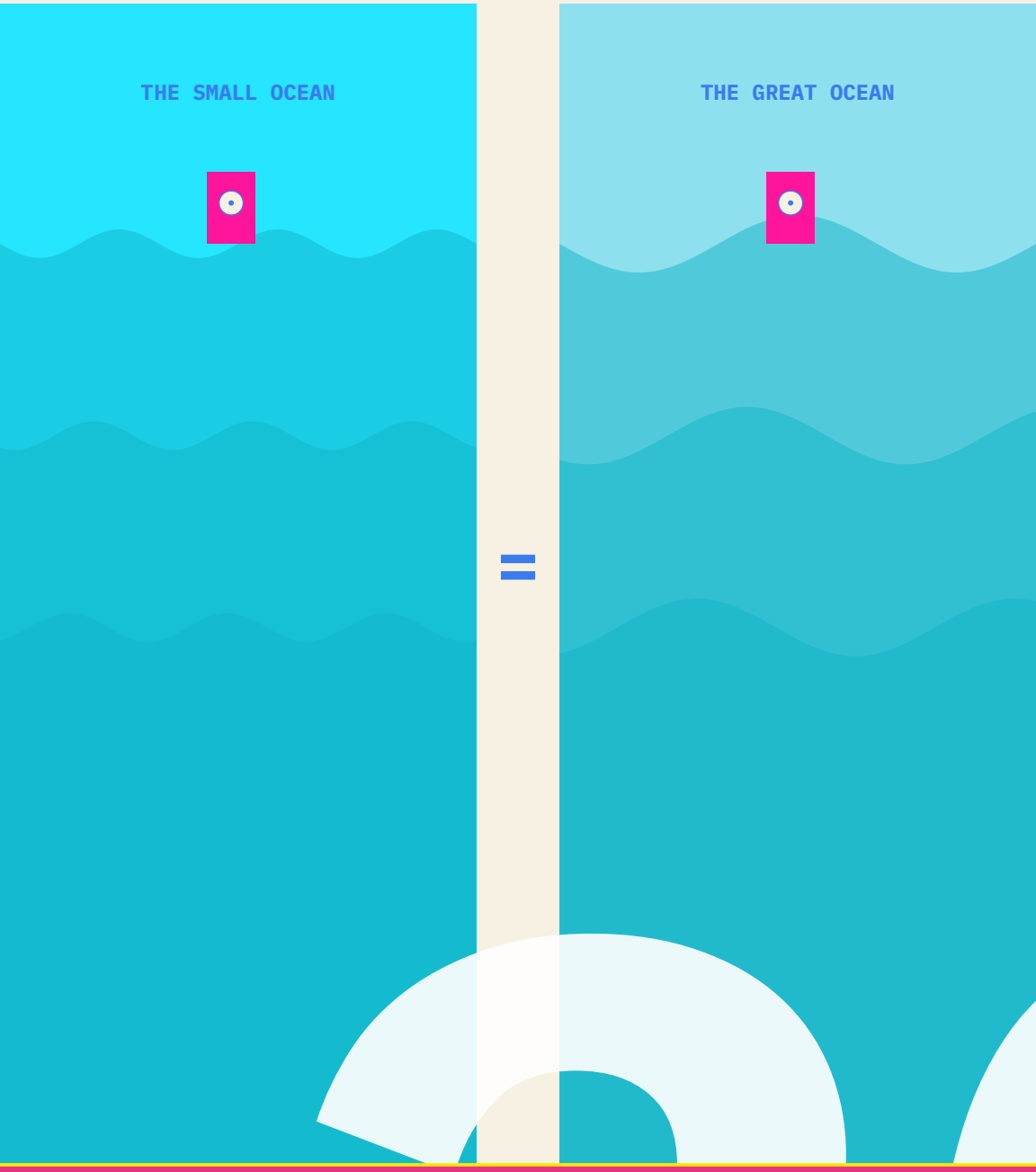

PLATE 20

The Two Oceans, Compared

Stand at the widest water you have ever seen and practise not being afraid of a far side you cannot see — because a much wider water is coming. The lake is the rehearsal; the Pacific is the performance; the fear is the same, and so is the courage.

CHAPTER THREE · THE PARLIAMENT NAMES THE PRACTICE

A Small Ocean, and What It Is For

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE TWELVE, IN ASSEMBLY ON THE CHICAGO SHORE

We put it to ourselves plainly, in assembly on the sand, the way you name a game before you play it: *at the end of this road we mean to walk into the Pacific and hide ourselves so grandly that we become a myth — and not one of us has practised hiding at that scale, and we would rather not fumble our own legend.* There. Said, and everyone laughing by the end of it, because said-out-loud it sounded less like a dread and more like a dare. We looked at the great lake and named it what it was: a small ocean. Deep enough to duck right under. Wide enough that the far side is a matter of faith. Cold and clean and deep and kind — kind because, unlike the Pacific, the lake hands you straight back. And so the Parliament resolved, unanimously, the merriest resolution in four hundred years of the moving city: *that here, in this small ocean, before we go on, we will practise the going-in. We will practise wading out past our own thresholds. We will practise sinking. We will practise hiding ourselves so completely that the shore cannot find us. And then — this is the part that matters, this is the whole glad point of the game — we will practise popping back up.*

Because the wobble was never really about the water. We are buildings; some of us are tidal; water is an old friend. The wobble was about the *hiding* — about tucking ourselves somewhere no eye could reach, and wondering, for one shivery delicious second, whether we would still be ourselves down there. And the only cure for a wobble like that is to go and do the thing, on purpose, in a merciful water, and pop up grinning to find you were never anything but yourself the whole

time. That is what we came to Chicago to learn. Not to stand at the edge being brave. To go *under* the edge, and hide, and rise, whooping.

The wobble was never about the water — it was about the hiding.
And the only cure for a wobble about vanishing is to vanish, on purpose, and pop up grinning.

PART THREE · THE PRACTICE NAMED

CHAPTER FOUR · THE FIRST SUBMERSION

The Follies Go Under First

THE FOLLIES OF MANNAHATTA, TIDAL, WHO LED THE FAMILY INTO THE DEEP

We went under first, because water is our mother tongue and hiding in it is nearly our nature. We waded out from the Chicago shore, past the shallow shelf the plate calls the soundings, out to where the lake-bed drops away and the water goes from bright to deep, and we let ourselves sink — slowly, on purpose, the way you lower yourself into a cold bath you have decided to love — until the water closed over our highest shingle and we were, from the shore, entirely gone. And here is what we learned in the first submersion, and called back up to the frightened family waiting on the sand: *it is dark down here, but it is not black.* The lake-light comes down green and gold and moving, and the deep is not an absence but a different bright, and a building that has hidden itself under the water is not gone — it is merely somewhere the shore cannot follow, which is a different thing entirely from gone. We stayed under a long time, that first day, learning the deep. And then we rose, streaming and glad, back into the wind, and the family cheered from the shore, because we had proven the thing they most needed proven: that you can go all the way under, all the way hidden, all the way invisible — and come back, and be exactly yourself, only wetter, and much less afraid.

It is dark down here, but it is not black.
A building that has hidden itself is not gone — only somewhere the shore cannot follow.

PART THREE · THE FIRST SUBMERSION

PLATE 21

The Towers' Breath, for Diving

The Conversing Towers — the red ones, who breathe the harbour and sing it back — taught the whole family the breath of diving: in deep at the surface, out slow going down, so the deep held no terror at all.

CHAPTER FIVE · THE FIVE STAGES OF HIDING

Rehearsed Until It Was a Game

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, WHO SET DOWN THE METHOD OF THE PRACTICE

We are the keepers of method, so we set the practice down in five stages, and the whole family drilled them, day after day, in the merciful lake, until the stages were no longer a dare but a delight — until vanishing became a thing the body knew and the heart looked forward to, the way a swimmer's body knows a stroke and a swimmer's heart knows the diving-board.

One: STAND. Stand at the very edge, on the wet sand, with the water at your threshold, and do not go in yet. Feel the whole glad size of the water. Feel the little flutter it puts in you — do not pretend it isn't there; that flutter is just excitement wearing a disguise. This is the stage most families wanted to skip straight past, and it is the one that matters most, because the flutter you stand still and feel is the flutter you get to turn, a breath later, into a running jump.

Two: WADE. Walk in, slowly, to the shallow shelf, where the water is only knee-deep on a building and the bottom is still bright beneath you. Get used to the cold. Get used to the wet. Get used to the strange new buoyancy, the way the water wants to lift you and hold you at once. Do not go deep yet. Just be a building standing in water, which is a small brave thing, and enough for one day.

Three: SINK. Wade out to where the shelf drops away, and let yourself down into the deep — on purpose, in control, breathing out slowly the way the Towers taught us. Feel the light change from bright to green-gold. Feel the shore lift away above you. This is the tickly, swoopy stage, the one that goes through you like the top of a swing, and the

practice turns the swoop from a gulp into a giggle, because you have done stages one and two and your whole body already trusts what your eyes are only now believing: that the deep is only deep, a big cool green room, and never once an ending.

Four: VANISH. Let the water close over your highest point, so that from the shore you cannot be seen at all. Be, for a held moment, entirely hidden — gone from every eye on the beach. This is the whole heart of the practice, the thing the Pacific will ask of you, and here, in the lake, you learn the enormous secret of it: *that being hidden and being gone are not the same.* You are down here, whole, yourself, bright in the green-gold deep. The shore simply cannot see you. That is all vanishing is. It is not annihilation. It is only a privacy the shore cannot enter.

Five: RESURFACE. And then come back. Burst up, streaming, into the wind and the light, into the whoops and applause of the ones who waited on the sand. This is the gladdest stage, the loud one, the one everybody practised most because it was the most fun, and it is the reason for all the others: because you learn, in the bursting-up, that hiding is not a one-way door. It is a breath. You go under, and you come back up, and the coming-back-up is not luck or rescue but the natural other half of the going-under, as sure as an out-breath follows an in-breath. Duck, and rise. Duck, and rise. Until the two are one bright bob of a motion, and there is nothing left in it but the fun.

Being hidden and being gone are not the same.
Vanishing is only a privacy the shore cannot enter — and
the coming-back is its natural other half.

PART THREE · THE FIVE STAGES

CHAPTER SIX · EACH FAMILY LEARNS ITS DEPTH

Who Took to It First, and Who Showed Off

THE TWELVE, IN TURN, ON WHAT THE HIDING-PRACTICE ASKED OF EACH

Each family found the practice differently, because each family is built differently, and the lake was patient with all of us. The **Conversing Towers** took to it soonest after the Follies, because we breathe, and hiding under water is mostly a matter of breath: breathe deep at the surface, breathe out slow going down, and the deep holds nothing but green quiet for a family that has learned to carry a whole long song in a single lungful. The **Flower Houses** took to it gladdest of the land-families, because we had hidden before — a garden tucks its bulbs under the ground all winter and throws them back up in spring, and hiding under water and blooming back is only that same old happy trick, done wetter. We bloomed underwater, in the lake, our petals streaming green-gold, and it was the most beautiful thing any of us had ever done.

The **Inflatable Crowns** had the funniest time of it, and struggled hardest, and here is the merry truth of why: we are full of air, we are made to rise, we are the most buoyant family there is — and so sinking, for us, is the most preposterous act imaginable, a wrestling-match against our own puffed-up nature. We simply would not stay under. The lake kept spitting us back before we were ready, popping us up like corks, over and over, until even we were laughing at ourselves, eleven soggy crowns bobbing about while the rest of the family cheered each ridiculous re-launch. And then the Follies taught us the thing that saved us: that we did not have to hide the way the heavy families hid. We could hide our own way — floating just beneath the surface, hidden but buoyant, present but unseen — because there is no single correct way to

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A WALL PROTECTS · A DOOR INVITES

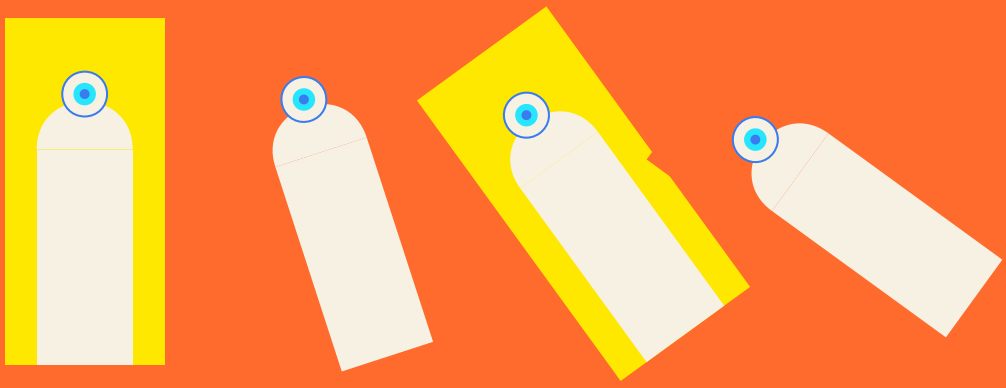


PLATE 22

The Facades Turn West

Rescued fronts that learned to be doors, the Facades faced every town the caravan passed and turned, at last, to face the water — because they chose long ago, and to the very end, to meet even the ocean open.

vanish, and a family that rises can rise so gently it disappears upward into the bright, which is its own kind of going-in. We stopped fighting our buoyancy. We learned to hide inside it. And we were not, after all, the family that failed.

The **Overscaled Follies**, being huge, could not hide by any smallness, so we learned to hide by lying down — lowering our great bodies flat along the lake-bed, vast and still, so that from the shore we read only as a shadow of deeper water. The **Pink Houses**, smallest of all, found hiding easiest of the land-families and hardest of heart, because a warm room does not want to close its one lit door and go dark under the water even for a moment; and we learned to keep the door's warmth inside us as we hid, a small held glow under the deep, so that we were hidden but never extinguished. The **Grey Ones** carried their lamps under with them and found that a lamp, underwater, does not go out but becomes a soft green globe of light, hidden but shining, which is exactly what a keeper is. And the **Plates** hid most gracefully of all: we simply lay flat on the surface, like a page laid on the water, and then let the page slip under, edge-first, without a ripple — here, and then quietly not-here, the way a thought slips under the surface of a mind.

There is no single correct way to vanish.
A family that rises can disappear upward into the bright;
a lamp, hidden, becomes a green globe of light.

PART THREE · EACH FAMILY'S DEPTH

CHAPTER SEVEN · THE HOUSE PRACTISES STAYING

While the Others Hide, One Learns to Wait

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, WHO DID NOT GO UNDER AT CHICAGO

I did not practise hiding, because hiding was never going to be my work. While the eleven waded out into the small ocean and drilled their vanishings, I stood on the Chicago shore and practised the thing that *would* be asked of me, three weeks west, at the real water: I practised staying — and, more to the point, I practised staying *glad*. I practised watching my whole family duck under the deep and, instead of lunging after them, giving them a cheerful wave and holding the bright certainty that they were down there whole, and would pop up any moment. I stood on the sand hour after hour with my hundred windows fixed on the smooth water where my kin had been, and I taught myself the keeper's happiest trick: to look at a surface they had slipped under and feel, not *they are gone,* but *they are hiding — and any second now, watch, here comes the splash.* The eleven practised vanishing. I practised trusting the water while I could not see a soul in it. And when they burst back up, streaming and whooping, I practised the best half of my work: the leap of the heart when the surface breaks and the loved thing comes home laughing — so that at the real water, on the far tide, however long it takes, my heart will still know exactly how to leap when they return.

We each rehearsed, in Chicago, the exact thing the Pacific would ask of us. The eleven rehearsed going. I rehearsed staying. And that, in the end, is why the going-in, when it finally came, was not a calamity but a carnival — because none of us arrived at the Pacific having never done our part before. We had practised, in a merciful small ocean, until the

grandest glad thing in the world had become a thing our bodies simply knew.

The eleven practised vanishing.
I practised believing in their return while I could not see them at all.

PART THREE · THE HOUSE PRACTISES STAYING

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE RESURFACING

The Gladdest Half of the Practice

THE WHOLE CARAVAN, RISING TOGETHER, ON THE LAST DAY AT THE LAKE

On the last day at the lake, we did the whole practice together, all eleven at once, with the House watching from the shore — waded out, and sank, and vanished, every one of us under the deep at the same moment, so that the great lake's surface closed and went smooth and empty, and there was, for one long held breath, no visible city on the water at all. The moving city of Mannahatta, entirely gone from sight. And the House stood alone on the shore, keeping its certainty. And then — together, on a signal felt more than heard — we rose. All eleven at once. The whole lake broke bright with the coming-back of us, streaming and cheering and laughing, the Crowns bobbing up from just beneath the surface, the Flowers blooming as they broke the water, the Follies leaping, the Plates sliding up flat and shining, the lamps of the Grey Ones surfacing still lit — and the House on the shore cheered until its hundred windows shook, because it had watched its whole family vanish and believed them back, and here they were, back, exactly as believed.

And that was when we knew we were ready. Not because we were no longer afraid — you are never entirely unafraid of a great water — but because we had turned the fear all the way over, in the merciful lake, until its bright underside showed: *that to hide is not to be lost, and to vanish is not to be gone, and the coming-back is as certain as the going-under, if only someone stays on the shore to believe it.* We had our practice. We had our method. We had, most of all, the House, who had learned to wait. We thanked the great lake, and the bright cousin-city beside it, and

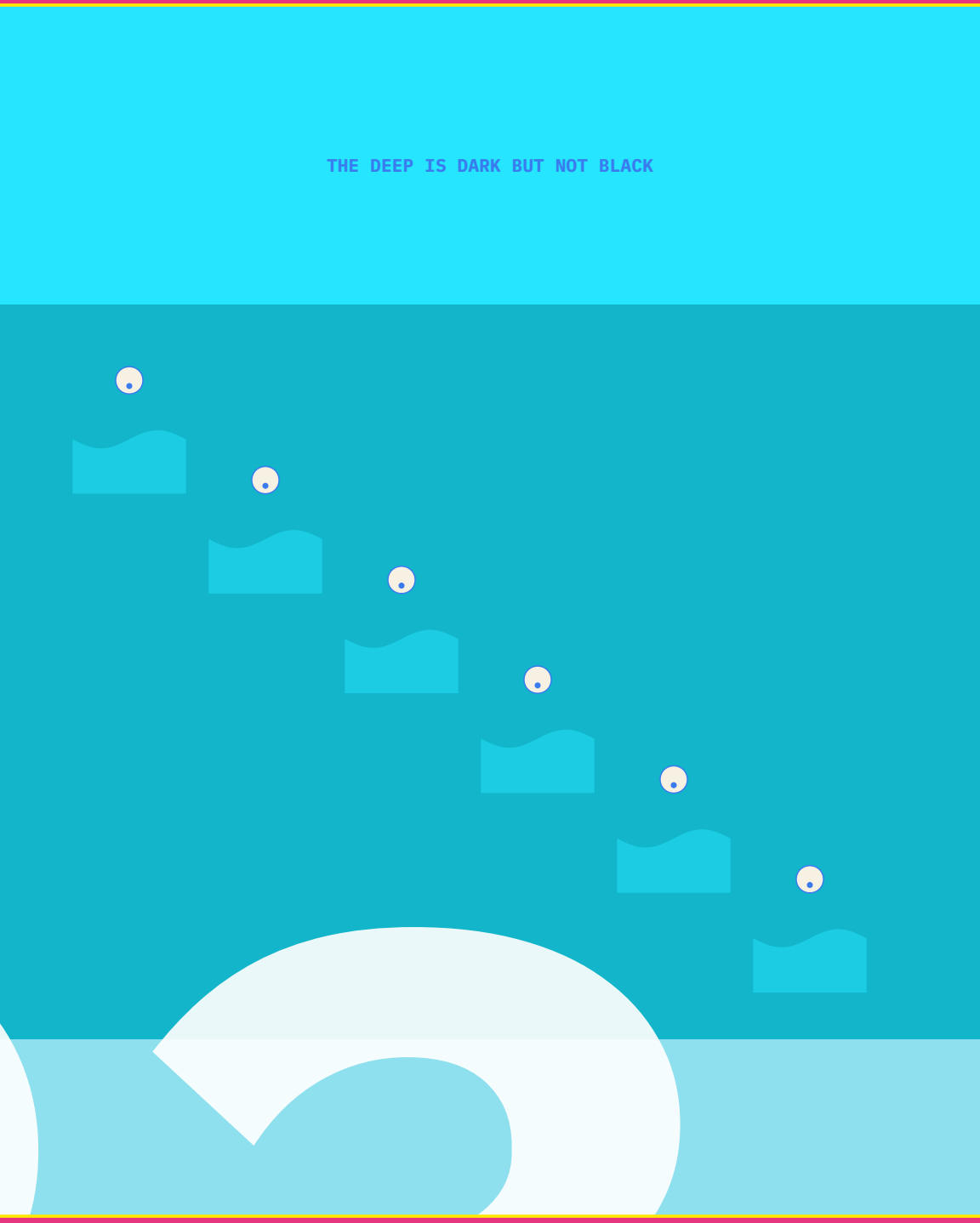


PLATE 23

The Tidal Ones, in the Small Ocean

The Follies went under first in the lake and taught the family that the deep is dark but not black, and that hidden is not gone — glad and unafraid, the way they had walked into every water they ever met.

we turned west again, toward the mountains and the desert and the last city and the real water — no longer a family that feared disappearing, but a family that had learned, in a small ocean, how to disappear and come home.

To hide is not to be lost; to vanish is not to be gone; and the coming-back is as certain as the going-under — if someone stays on the shore to believe it.

PART THREE · THE RESURFACING

CHAPTER NINE · THE PLATES RECORD THE REHEARSAL

A Method, Set Down Flat

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, WHO KEPT THE WHOLE PRACTICE LEGIBLE

We lay flat by the lake each evening and recorded the day's practice — the soundings, the depths each family reached, the stages drilled, the fears named and turned — because a family about to do the hardest thing it will ever do deserves a clear bright record of how it learned. And the record we kept is the plate at the head of this part: the plan of the small ocean with its soundings; the section of the graded dive with each family at its practised depth; the five stages, drawn frame by frame. Keep it. Not because you will ever have to walk into an ocean and disappear — few readers will — but because everyone, sooner or later, has to do a frightening irreversible thing, and the method is the same for all of them. Name the fear. Wade in slowly. Sink on purpose. Learn that hidden is not gone. And practise, above all, the coming-back — because the coming-back is the half everyone forgets to rehearse, and it is the half that turns a terror into a ceremony.

Everyone, sooner or later, must do a frightening irreversible thing.
The method is the same: name the fear, wade in slow, learn that hidden is not gone — and rehearse the coming-back.

PART THREE · THE RECORD OF THE PRACTICE

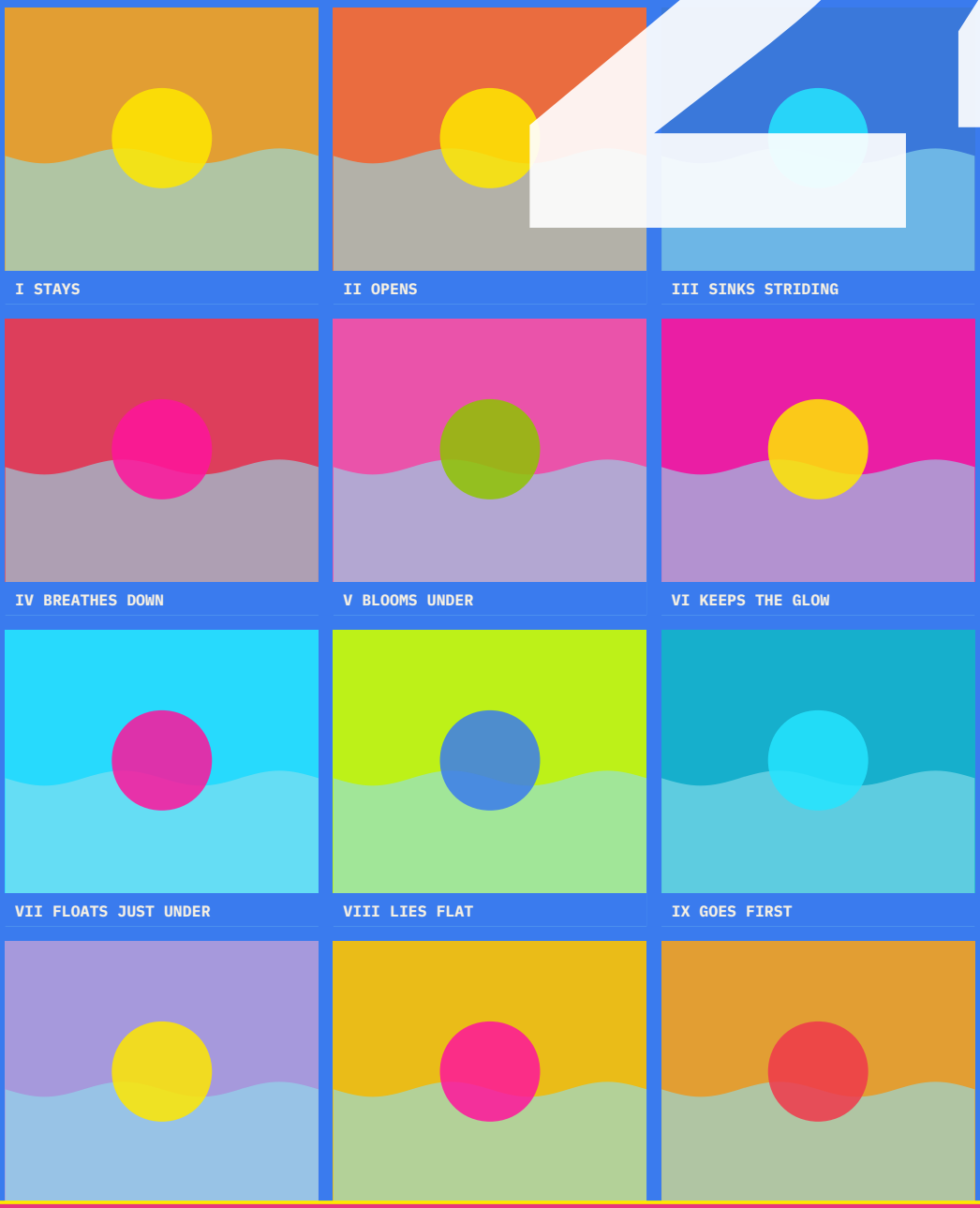


PLATE 24

Each Family's Way of Hiding

Twelve mercies for one disappearance. The House does not hide but stays; the Facades hide by opening; the Plates slip under edge-first without a ripple. Every family learned to vanish in the shape of what it already was.

CHAPTER TEN · THE CHILDREN LEARN TO HIDE

The Children Learn To Hide

THE CHILD-SCRIBES, SMALLEST OF THE WALKERS, AT THE LAKE

We were only children, and the practice frightened us most, because we had the least practice at anything and the most life still ahead to be afraid of losing. But the families would not let us skip it — gently, patiently, they taught us too, in the shallowest merciful part of the lake, to wade and to sink and to hide and, above all, to come back. And here is what the practice gave us, we who were too young to be walking into any ocean and would not, in the end, go in — it gave us the thing that let us bear watching the ones we loved go in: it taught us, in our own small bodies, that hiding is not gone. Because we had hidden ourselves, in the shallow lake, and come back, we could believe the families would too. You cannot truly believe a thing you have not, in some small form, done yourself. The lake let us do the small form. And so when the great water came, we did not despair, we who stayed on the shore with the House — because we had hidden, once, in a merciful lake, and come back, and knew in our own small bones that the hidden come back.

You cannot truly believe a thing you have not, in some small form, done yourself. The lake let even us children hide, and come back, so that we would be able to believe the ones we loved back, across whatever distance the return required.

You cannot truly believe a thing you have not, in some small form, done yourself.
The lake let even the children hide, and come back — so they could believe the others back.

PART THREE · THE CHILDREN LEARN TO HIDE

CHAPTER ELEVEN · THE CROWNS OVER THE LAKE

Seeing the Far Shore, and Calling It Back

THE INFLATABLE CROWNS, RISEN OVER THE GREAT LAKE IN THE WIND

On our last evening we rose — we who had struggled most to sink now rose gladly, because rising is our joy and we had earned it back — high over the family and the waves and the whole bright inland sea, and from up there we saw the thing the others could not: that the lake had a far side after all. Faint, low, blue on the horizon — but there. And we called it down: *there is another shore; there is always another shore; the water is wide but it is not the end.* And we understood, floating there in the great lake-wind, that this was the gift our struggle had given us — that the family that has the hardest time sinking is exactly the family that can rise the highest, and see the farthest, and call the far shore back to the ones still learning to disappear. Every fear, turned, becomes a gift shaped exactly like itself. We feared rising too well to hide; and so we became the ones who rise well enough to promise a far shore. That is the whole arithmetic of radical joy, done once more, over a bright lake, in a clean wind, at the end of the rehearsal.

Every fear, turned, becomes a gift shaped exactly like itself.
We feared rising too well to hide — and so became the ones who rise to promise a far shore.

PART THREE · THE CROWNS OVER THE LAKE

◆ END OF PART THREE ◆

AN INTERLUDE · FOUR WORDS FOR A GOING-UNDER

On the Words *Hide*, *Vanish*, *Rise*, and *Return*

The Supergraphic Plates, who kept the record at the lake, pause to keep four words as well.

Hide. From an old word meaning to cover, to keep safe, to shelter — the same root that gives us *hoard* and, further back, the hide that shelters a body. To hide a thing was first to protect it, not to lose it. This is the oldest and truest meaning, and it is the one the lake taught us: to hide is to keep safe under a covering. The families who hid in the water were not lost. They were sheltered — held safe under the covering of the deep, the way a seed is hidden safe in the ground before it blooms.

Vanish. From a word meaning to become empty, to fade from view — but note, and note carefully, that it means to fade from *view*, not to cease. A thing that vanishes has not stopped being; it has stopped being *seen.* The lake taught us the whole difference: the families who vanished under the water were entirely unseen from the shore and entirely present in the deep. To vanish is a fact about the watcher's eye, never about the vanished thing. Remember this the next time something you love goes out of your sight.

Rise. From a word simply meaning to get up, to stand, to go upward — the plainest, gladdest word of the four. The Crowns

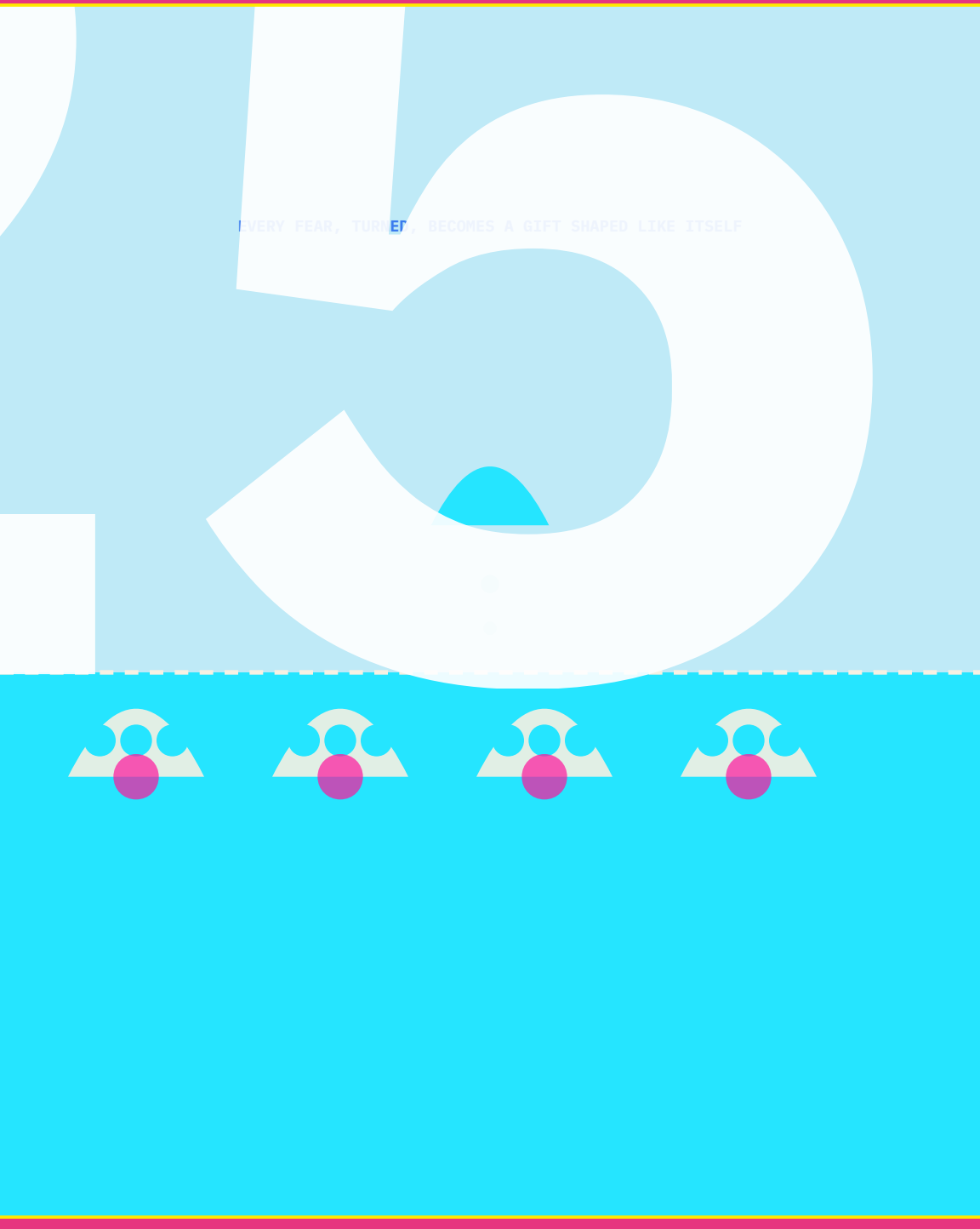


PLATE 25

The Crowns Learn to Hide in Their Buoyancy

Full of air and made to rise, the Inflatable Crowns could not sink — and wept — then learned to hide their own way, disappearing upward into the bright. The family that struggled most to sink rises highest and sees the far shore first.

taught us that rising can itself be a way of hiding, and that hiding, done rightly, always bends toward a rising. Every going-under leans, by its nature, toward a coming-up. The two are not opposites. The rise is folded inside the hiding like a bloom inside a bulb.

Return. From *re-*, again, and *turnare,* to turn — the great turn, performed once more. We have kept this word before, at another point in the book, but it belongs here too, at the lake, because the lake is where we learned that hiding and returning are one turning and not two. You do not hide, and then separately decide to return. The return is the far half of the same single motion the hiding began. To go under is already, in its deepest grammar, to be on the way back up.

To hide is to keep safe under a covering. To vanish is to fade from view, never to cease. To rise is folded inside the hiding like a bloom inside a bulb. And to return is the far half of the same turning the hiding began.

— FOUR WORDS FOR A GOING-UNDER, KEPT BRIGHT

IV

PART FOUR · THE MOUNTAINS & THE DESERT · THE HIGH DRY MILES

The Farther Crossing

up over the mountains, down into the gold, and changed by the light

In which the twelve leave the green country behind and climb into the thin bright air of the mountains, and come down the far side into the gold desert, and discover that a family can be changed by the light it walks through without being changed in what it is — that the desert makes them brighter, not poorer, and that they bloom hardest exactly where the ground is driest.

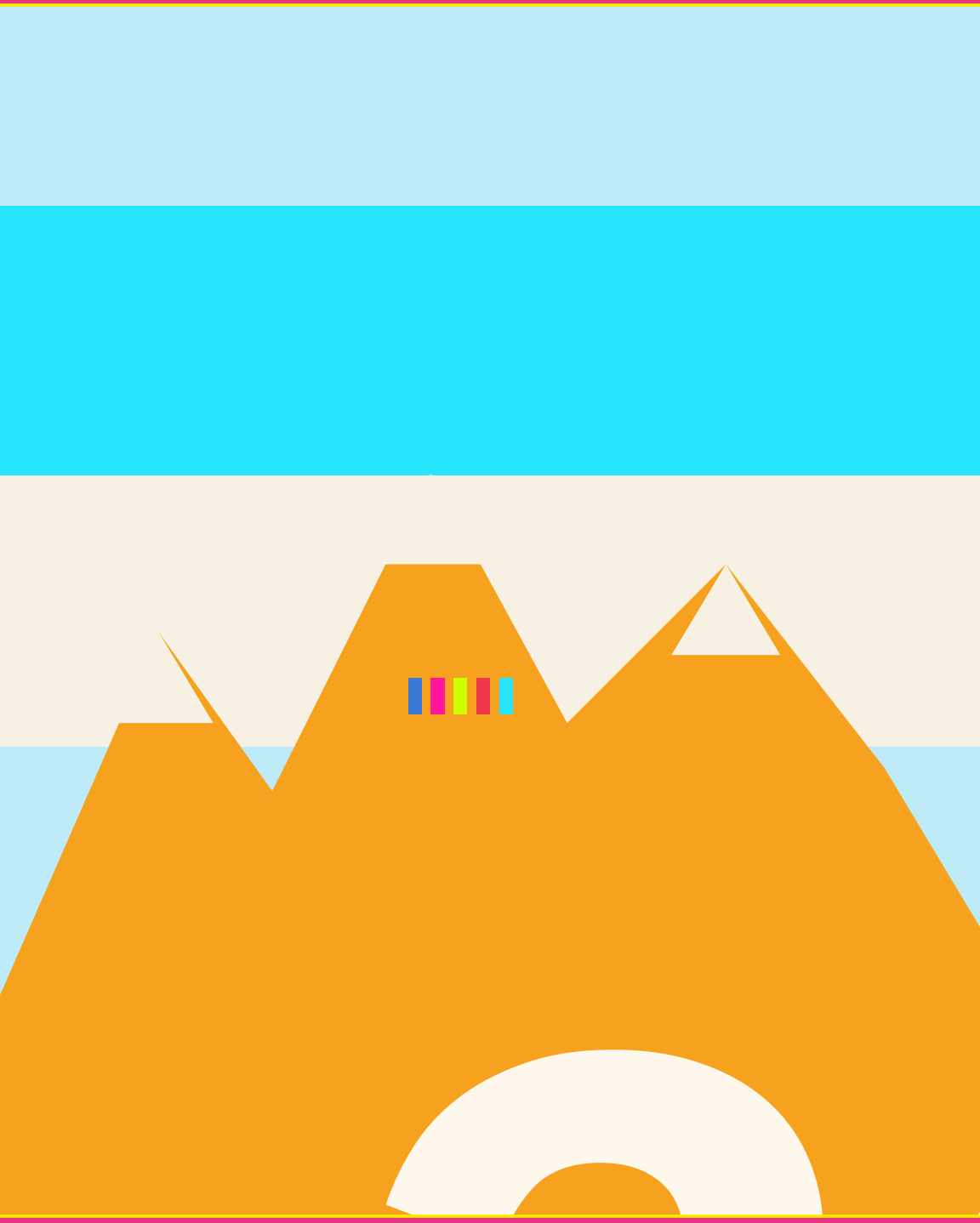


PLATE 26

The High Crossing

Up in the thin bright air even the loudest family goes quiet, and the quiet is not fear but awe — the gladdest silence there is. The mountains are for being made small by something magnificent and finding you do not mind.

CHAPTER ONE · THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES MAKE A PASS

Hugeness as a Kindness, Again

THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES, WHO WENT FIRST INTO THE MOUNTAINS

The mountains were the first thing on the whole road that was larger than we were, and we are the Overscaled Follies, so we take the measure of large things personally. We went first. We are huge — huge enough that we could set our enormous bodies against the slope and make, of ourselves, a pass: a low broad ramp of folly for the rest of the family to walk up and over. This is the whole of what our hugeness is for, and we had said so in the last book and we proved it here: a huge unkind thing is a catastrophe, and a huge kind thing is the gentlest shelter there is, because it has the most tenderness and the most room to keep it in. We made ourselves into a mountain pass for our kin. The thin air made even the loud families quiet — not from fear, but from awe, which is louder than fear and much better company — and we carried them over the roof of the country, and down the far side, into the gold.

CHAPTER TWO · THE FLOWER HOUSES IN THE DESERT

Blooming Hardest Where It Is Driest

THE FLOWER HOUSES, ELDEST OF WHOM WAS ONCE A GRAVEYARD

The desert should have been the hardest country for us. We are the Flower Houses; we bloom; and a place with no water is a place, you would think, with no blooming. But we are also the family that learned, longest ago of anyone, that you bloom hardest not where it is easy but where it is needed — that the eldest of us was a graveyard before she was a garden, and opened her flowers over the driest grief of all. So the desert did not defeat us. The desert *called* us. In all that gold dry silence we opened wider than we ever had on the wet green island, every petal a citizen once held, blazing across the cracked ground, and the desert that was supposed to be the death of blooming became the best stage blooming ever had. Do not fear the dry places. The dry places are exactly where the world most needs you to open.

You bloom hardest not where it is easy,
but where it is needed.

PART FOUR · THE DESERT BLOOM

PLATE 27

The Wide Bright Nothing

A stretch so vast the whole moving city becomes a bright thread on a gold horizon. There is nothing to cross here but distance, and nothing to do but keep the pace and trust the west — and it is, somehow, a joy.

CHAPTER THREE · THE LIGHT CHANGES THEM

The Same Family, Under Four Skies

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, WHO RECORDED EVERY COLOUR OF THE JOURNEY

We keep the record, so let us set down the truest thing we noticed across the whole crossing: the families changed colour, and did not change at all. In the Atlantic dawn they were one set of colours; on the plains at noon another; in the desert gold a third; and they would be a fourth thing entirely in the Pacific dusk that was still ahead of us. The same twelve. The same griefs, turned; the same names. And yet the House was a different warmth in the desert than it had been on the pier, and the red towers burned a deeper red under the western sun, and the whole caravan took the light of each new sky and wore it — not as a disguise, but as a greeting, the way you might return a smile. This is a thing worth knowing before an ending: that a thing can be wholly changed by what it passes through and remain, underneath, entirely itself. It is how you survive a journey. It is also, we would learn very soon, how you survive an arrival.

CHAPTER FOUR · THE TOWERS IN THE THIN AIR

Breathing Where the Air Is Small

THE CONVERSING TOWERS, WHO BREATHE, HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS

Up in the pass the air went thin, and we are the ones who breathe, so the thin air was ours to solve. We breathed slower. We breathed deeper. We took the small cold bright mountain air all the way down into our red chambers and warmed it and gave it back, and we breathed for the whole family up there, the way you breathe for someone you love who has forgotten, for a moment, how. And we learned a thing about breath at altitude that is also a thing about grief at its worst: when there is very little air, you do not panic and gulp; you slow down, and go deep, and take what little there is all the way in, and it is enough. It is always, just barely, gloriously enough. We breathed the family over the roof of the country on very little air, slowly, deeply, and not one of us ran out — because we had learned, long before the mountains, that the trick to a thin bright air is the same as the trick to a hard bright grief: do not gulp. Go deep. It is enough.

When there is very little air, do not gulp. Go deep.
It is always, just barely, gloriously enough.

PART FOUR · BREATH IN THE THIN AIR

28

BLOOM HARDEST WHERE THE GROUND IS DRIEST

PLATE 28

The Desert Crossing

The driest, hardest, most unlikely stretch — and exactly where you must open widest. A bloom in easy country is only pretty; a bloom in the desert is a proof that your brightness was never about your soil.

CHAPTER FIVE · THE GREY ONES AND THE DARK THAT WAS NOT BLACK

Keeping a Lamp in the High Desert Night

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, KEEPERS OF LAMPS, ON THE DESERT NIGHTS

The desert nights were the darkest of the whole road, and so they were most ours, because we are the keepers of lamps and the dark is the country we were made for. But here is what we want set down, high in the cold desert dark, under more stars than any of the young ones had ever imagined: even out there, the dark was not black. We have said the rule so many times it may sound like a slogan, but on those desert nights it was a lived and literal truth — the sky was so thick with stars, and our lamps so warm on the sand, and the risen moon so gold on the rocks, that the darkest hour of the darkest night on the whole three thousand miles was still, if you looked at it rightly, a kind of dim bright. We kept our lamps low and steady and we taught the frightened young ones to find, in even the deepest desert dark, the small lights that were always there — a star, a lamp, a coal, a moon — so that they would never, their whole lives, mistake a dark night for a black one. There is no black night. There are only nights you have not yet found the lights in.

There is no black night.
There are only nights you have not yet found the lights in.

PART FOUR · THE DARK THAT WAS NOT BLACK

CHAPTER SIX · THE PINK HOUSES AT ALTITUDE

A Warm Room in the Thin Cold Air

THE PINK HOUSES, SMALLEST OF THE TWELVE, HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS

High in the mountains, where the air went thin and cold and the big families breathed slow and whispered from awe, we did the small enormous thing we always do: we kept everyone warm. A warm room matters most exactly where it is hardest to make one, and there is nowhere harder to make a warm room than a mountain pass at night with the wind coming off the snow. So we worked hardest there. We banked our one warm room against the cold and opened our one pink door just enough, and the whole shivering awestruck family crowded into our little glow and thawed, and told the day's high crossing back to one another, and were a home again, ten thousand feet up, in the thin bright air. Do not think the small families do not matter on the hard passages. On the hard passages the small families matter most. Grandeur gets you up the mountain. A warm room is what keeps you alive at the top of it.

Grandeur gets you up the mountain.
A warm room is what keeps you alive at the top of it.

PART FOUR · THE PINK HOUSES AT ALTITUDE

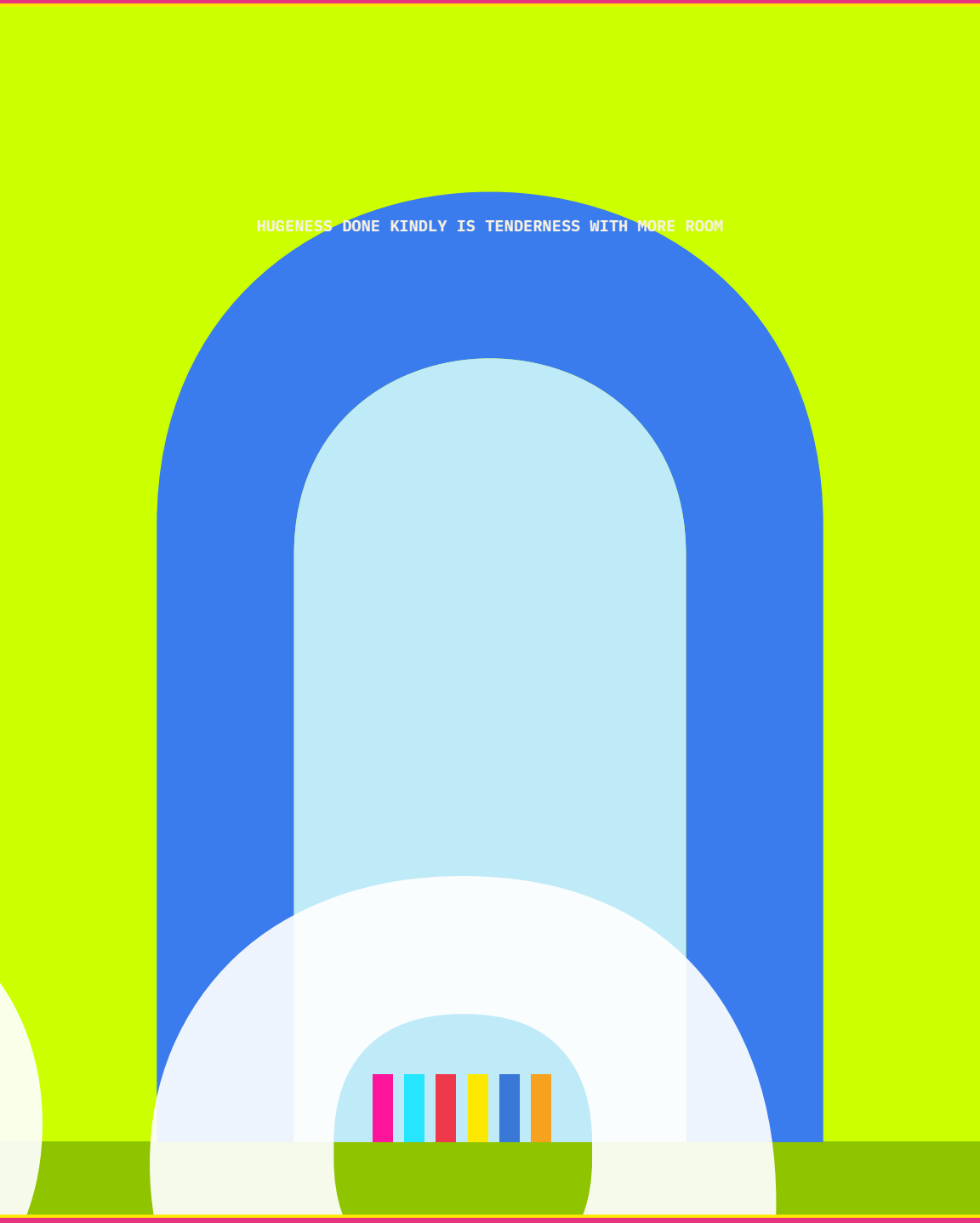


PLATE 29

The Follies Go Huge

The Overscaled Follies made themselves a mountain pass for their kin — hugeness done as kindness, with the most room to keep it in. The point of being very large is to be, at the last, very gently in the way.

CHAPTER SEVEN · THE WALKING CITIES SLOW FOR THE CLIMB

The Walking Cities Slow For The Climb

THE WALKING CITIES, WHO SET THE PACE, ON THE MOUNTAIN GRADE

We set the pace the whole way, and on the mountains we did the thing a good pace-setter must and a proud one never will: we slowed down. The grade went up, the air went thin, the small families began to labour — and we, who could have climbed faster, deliberately shortened our stride to the pace of the most tired among us, so that no family was ever left behind on the mountain, ever, not once. This is the whole art of leading a family across hard country, and we will set it down plainly because so many leaders get it wrong: you do not set the pace to your own strength. You set it to the family's endurance. A leader who climbs at their own best speed arrives at the summit alone, which is not arriving at all. We arrived at the top of the country all twelve together, slowly, because the point was never to summit first. The point was to summit as a family.

We could have been over the pass by noon. We crested it at dusk, all twelve together, no one behind, and that dusk crossing — slow, complete, whole — was worth more than any faster one could ever have been.

You do not set the pace to your own strength.
You set it to the family's endurance — and arrive
together, or you have not arrived.

PART FOUR · THE WALKING CITIES SLOW

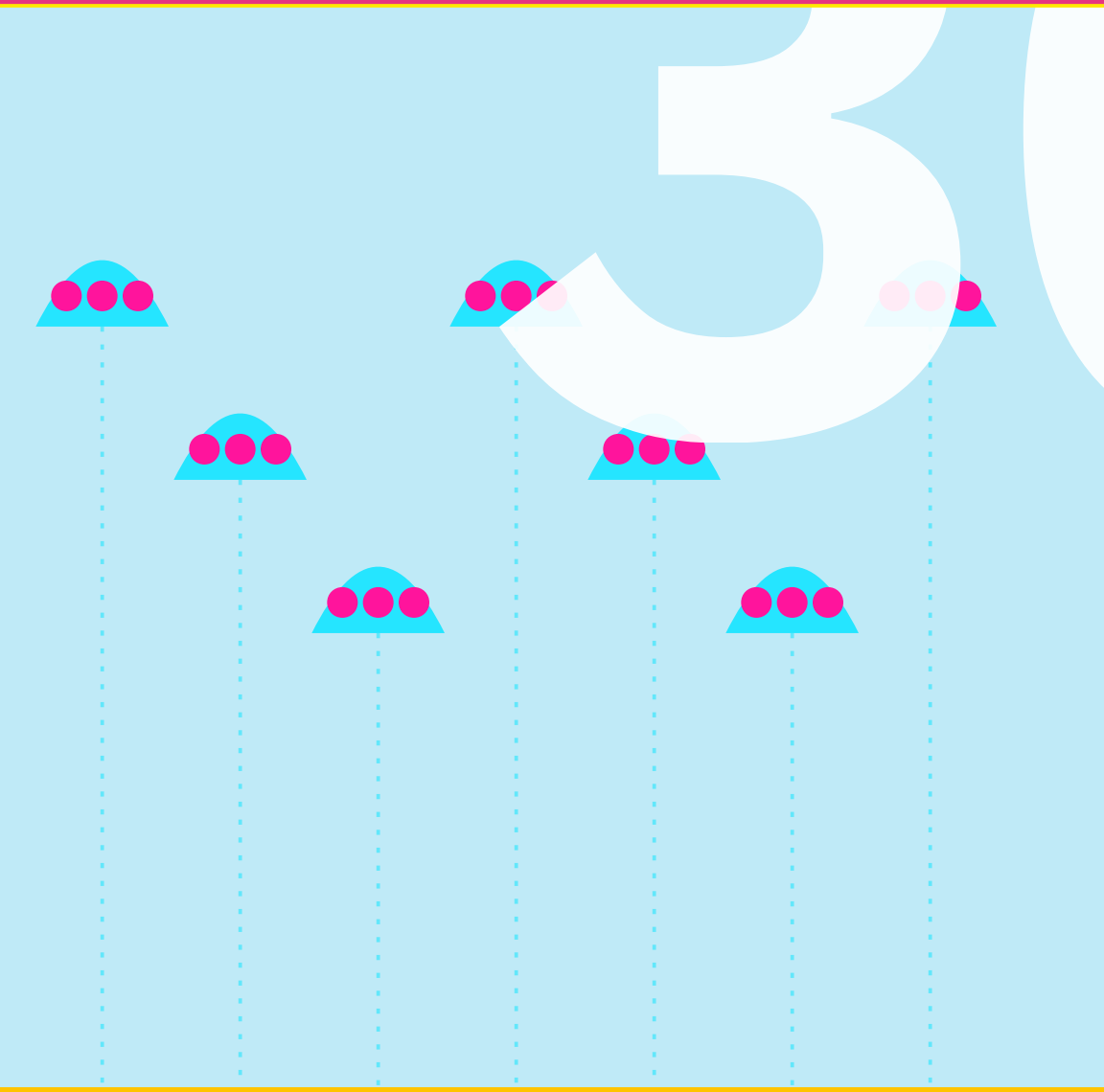


PLATE 30

The Crowns Over the Plains

Soft bright headgear for a city in a generous mood, the Inflatable Crowns rose over every town in a parade and turned each leaving into a festival — rising highest, and seeing the far shore first.

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE PARLIAMENT IN THE DESERT SILENCE

The Parliament In The Desert Silence

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE TWELVE, IN ASSEMBLY UNDER THE DESERT STARS

We held an assembly in the desert, at night, in the enormous silence, and it was the quietest Parliament we ever held, because the desert makes even a loud city thoughtful. And the question we sat with, under all those stars, was the one we had been walking toward: *are we sure?* Not afraid — we had cured the fear at the lake — but sure. Sure that walking into the ocean and becoming a myth was the right turning of this joy, and not merely the grandest. And we decided, in the desert silence, unanimously, that we were sure — because we looked up, and there were the twelve of us already written in the stars, the constellation waiting, and it did not feel like a fate being forced on us but like a home being offered. The sky had kept us a place. All we had to do was walk far enough west to take it. In the desert silence, under our own waiting constellation, the last doubt left the family, and did not return.

We asked ourselves, in the desert silence: are we sure? And the stars had already answered — the twelve of us were written up there, waiting, a home the sky had kept. We had only to walk far enough west to take it.

The sky had kept us a place.
All we had to do was walk far enough west to take it.

PART FOUR · THE DESERT ASSEMBLY

CHAPTER NINE · THE FOLLIES CROSS THE SALT FLATS

The Follies Cross The Salt Flats

THE FOLLIES OF MANNAHATTA, TIDAL, ON THE DRY WHITE DESERT

The strangest miles of the whole road, for us, were the salt flats — a great white desert that had been a sea once, an ocean bed gone dry and bright and cracked, salt to the horizon where water used to be. We are the tidal ones, and to walk across the floor of a dead sea was the eeriest and most instructive thing we ever did, because the salt flats are a warning and a promise at once. A warning: even an ocean can go. And a promise: even where an ocean has gone, the shape of it remains, the bed of it waits, the salt of it keeps the memory of the water bright and white and unmistakable — so that anyone crossing knows, *a sea was here, and could be here again.* We crossed the dry sea thinking of the wet one waiting at the end of the road, and we were not frightened, but sobered, and then gladdened — because the salt flats taught us that a sea's going is not a sea's ending, that the bed keeps the shape, that the water is only elsewhere, gathering, the way a tide gathers, to come back.

Even where an ocean has gone, the bed of it keeps the shape and the salt keeps the memory — so that anyone crossing knows a sea was here, and could be here again. A sea's going is never a sea's ending.

Even where an ocean has gone, the bed keeps the shape. A sea's going is never a sea's ending — the water is only elsewhere, gathering, to come back.

PART FOUR · THE SALT FLATS

PLATE 31

The Flowers Bloom Dry

The oldest grief on the island, turned to petal, bloomed hardest in the driest desert — proving that a family opens because of what it is, not because of where, and opens widest exactly where the world most needs it.

CHAPTER TEN · THE TOWERS SING THE CANYON

The Towers Sing The Canyon

THE CONVERSING TOWERS, WHO BREATHE AND SING, IN A GREAT RED CANYON

We came through a canyon so deep and red and vast that even we, who are never quiet, went silent going in — and then, because we are the ones who breathe and singing is shaped breathing, we could not stay silent, and we sang one note, all of us together, into the great red hollow of it. And the canyon sang it back. Our one note came home to us multiplied a hundredfold, echoing off the red walls, filling the whole enormous space with the sound of ourselves returned — and the family stood in the bottom of the world listening to a note they had made come back to them larger and lovelier than they had sent it out. We have never forgotten it, and we set it here as a small parable of the whole book: that what you send bravely out into a great hollow space does not vanish. It comes back to you, changed, enlarged, made lovelier by the very emptiness you feared to sing into. We sang one note into the biggest emptiness we ever saw, and it came home a chorus. The going-in, we understood then, would be the same.

What you send bravely out into a great hollow space does not vanish. It comes back to you, changed, enlarged, made lovelier by the very emptiness you feared to sing into.

What you send bravely into a great emptiness does not vanish.
It comes back changed, enlarged, made lovelier by the very hollow you feared.

PART FOUR · THE TOWERS SING THE CANYON

CHAPTER ELEVEN · THE RIVER OF STARS

The River Of Stars

THE CHILD-SCRIBES, ON THE CLEAREST DESERT NIGHT OF THE WHOLE ROAD

On the clearest night of the desert the sky put out a river of its own — a great pale band of stars from one horizon to the other, so thick and bright it looked like a road laid across the black, or rather across the not-black, for even that river ran through a dark that this book will not call by the forbidden name. And the Grey Ones pointed at it and told us its old name, the milk-white road, and said the thing we wrote down and have never forgotten: *look — the sky has a road too, and it also runs west, and it is also crossed by walking lights, and no one has ever called the sky empty for having a dark between its stars.* We understood, that night, that the dark we were walking into at the end of the road was the same dark the stars hang in — not an absence, but a field; not an ending, but the bright deep space that holds up every light there is.

No one has ever called the sky empty for having a dark between its stars. We learned, under the river of stars, that the dark is not an absence but a field — the bright deep space that holds up every light there is.

No one calls the sky empty for the dark between its stars. The dark is not an absence but a field — the deep space that holds up every light there is.

PART FOUR · THE RIVER OF STARS

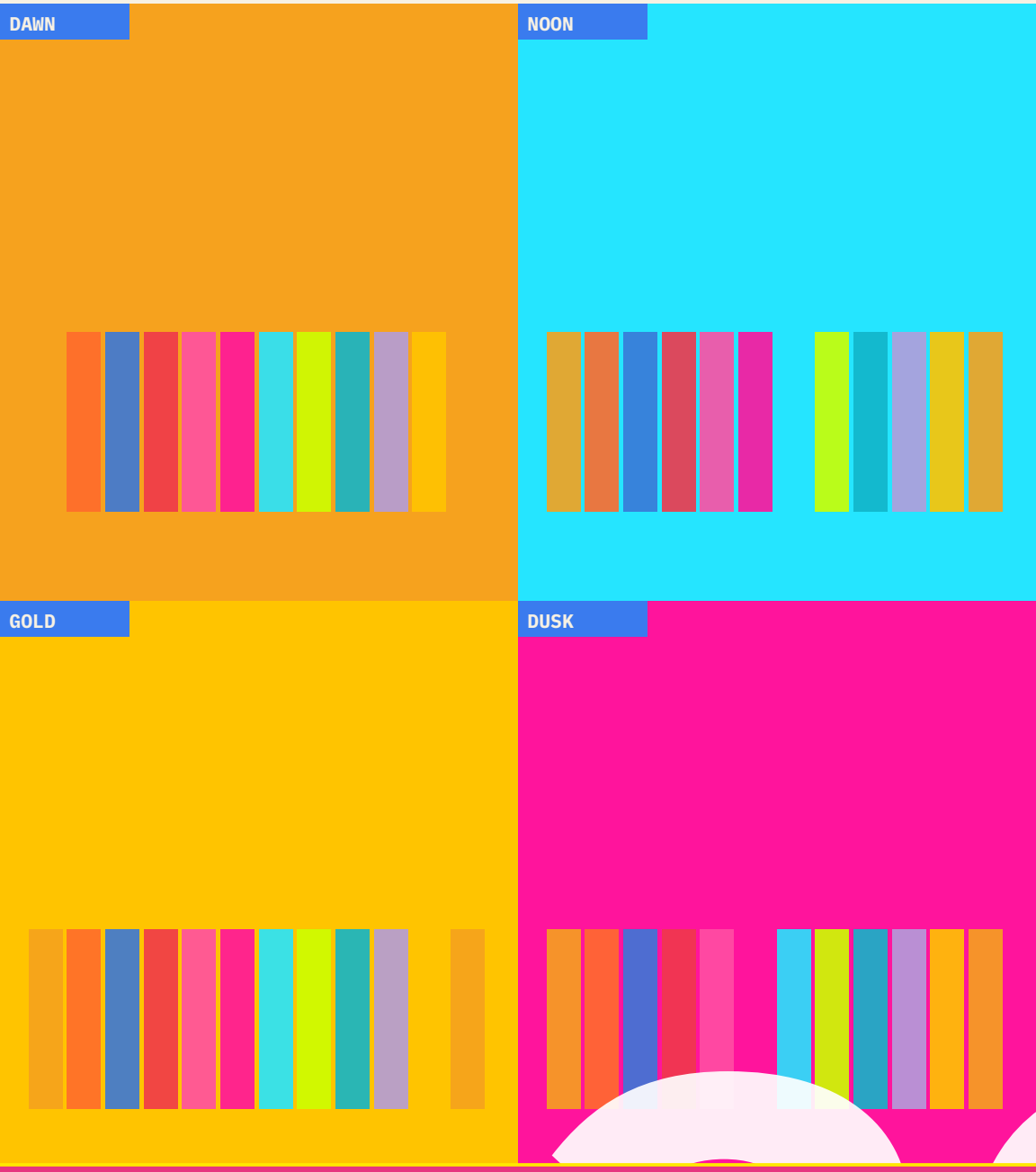


PLATE 32

The Twelve Under Four Lights

Across the whole crossing the families changed colour and did not change at all: one set of hues in the Atlantic dawn, another in the desert gold — the same twelve, lit differently, the way any loved thing is.

◆ END OF PART FOUR ◆

PLATE 33

Camp Under Enormous Stars

A night on the road, drawn the only way this book allows: even the dark is bright. The Grey Ones lit a lamp for every mile and taught the young ones there is no black night — only a sky full of coloured, patient light.

AN INTERLUDE · A NIGHT ON THE ROAD

Camp Under Enormous Stars

One night in the desert, kept by the child-scribes, because some nights are worth keeping whole.

There was a night in the desert we have never forgotten, and never will, and mean to pass on to our children so that they cannot forget it either. The Pink Houses had made their warm room and we had eaten, and then the whole family lay out on the cooling sand and looked up, and the sky was so full of stars it did not look dark at all — it looked, if anything, *overfull of light,* which is the only kind of night this island has ever believed in.

And the Orthographic Ones, who keep the lamps, pointed up and showed us a shape among the stars — twelve of them, bright, in the rough figure of a family — and said, very quietly, so as not to wake the little ones: *look; there we are already; the sky has been keeping a place for us the whole time.* None of us understood, that night, what they meant. We understood later, at the water, when the lamps went up. But we lay there, that night in the desert, under the twelve of ourselves, and slept the deep glad sleep of a family that has walked all day toward something bright and is not, any longer, afraid of arriving.

The sky had been keeping a place for us the whole time.
We only had to walk far enough west to look up and see it.

— A NIGHT IN THE GOLD DESERT

V

PART FIVE · LOS ANGELES · WHERE THE COUNTRY RUNS OUT

The Last City

the loud light, the warm sand, and the last dry supper

In which the caravan reaches Los Angeles, the last city, where the land finally runs out of country and the light gets loud and gold and endless; and the twelve come down at last to the warm sand at the very western edge, and share one last dry supper, and look out at the whole Pacific waiting to be walked.

THESURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

CHAPTER ONE · THE EDGE OF THE COUNTRY

The Country Was the Easy Part

THE CONVERSING TOWERS, WHO BREATHE, STANDING AT THE LAST SHORE

We reached Los Angeles and walked through it to the water, and the light there was unlike any light on the whole road — gold and loud and flat and endless, a light that does not fall on things so much as fill them, and we are the Conversing Towers, we breathe, and we stood at the edge and breathed that enormous Pacific light all the way in. And one of us said the thing the whole family was feeling: *we came to the edge of the country, and the country had been the easy part.* Three thousand miles of walking, and it had been easy, because walking with your kin at the speed of talking is the easiest joy there is. The hard part was here. The hard part was the water — the real water, the one that does not end, the one you cannot walk around and come out the far side of. The hard part was that we had walked all this way to arrive, at last, at a goodbye, and now we had to learn to turn it, the way we had turned everything, and keep it bright.

PLATE 34

Los Angeles, the Last City

The last dry supper under the enormous gold Pacific light. Los Angeles is for filling yourself with the whole edge of the country, and knowing you have arrived, and turning at last to face the water and the goodbye.

CHAPTER TWO · THE FOLLIES AGAINST THE LAST SUNSET

Huge, and Gentle, at the End of the Land

THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES, ENORMOUS AGAINST THE PACIFIC SKY

At the last city we stood our great bodies up against the biggest sunset any of us had ever seen — flat gold bands of it, stacked to the top of the sky — and we are the huge ones, so we were the only family big enough to be silhouetted whole against it, and we let ourselves be. The sun set behind us and we did not mind; we have never minded being the thing the light has to go around, so long as we can be gentle about it, so long as our hugeness makes a shade and not a shadow. And standing there, enormous and gold-rimmed at the edge of the country, we understood the last lesson of our own size: that the point of being very large is to be, at the last, very gently in the way — to stand between your small kin and the enormity of what is coming, and take the first of it on your own broad patient body, so that when the family walks past you into the water, they walk past having already seen that even the biggest thing among them was unafraid.

The point of being very large is to be, at the last,
very gently in the way — a shade, and never a shadow.

PART FIVE · THE FOLLIES AT THE EDGE

CHAPTER THREE · THE PLATES LAY DOWN THE LAST MAP

The Record Closes at the Water

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, RECORDING THE LAST CITY, AND THEN THE EDGE

We lay flat one final time at the edge of the country and drew the last map, and it was the strangest map we ever made, because half of it was land we had crossed and half of it was water we could not. This side of the line: three thousand bright miles, every one of them recorded, legible, kept. That side of the line: the Pacific, blank, enormous, unrecordable — the one country a plate cannot flatten and keep. And we made a decision, drawing that last map, that we want set down plainly here, because it is the whole philosophy of our family: we did not leave the far side blank because we had failed to record it. We left it blank *on purpose,* bright and open and waiting, because some things you do not map. Some things you leave open on the page, so that whoever reads the record later knows the story is not finished — that there is a whole shining country still to be crossed, and a homecoming still to be drawn, on a tide, on a page, that has not, yet, arrived. Our last map ends in an open blankness. That blankness is not an ending. It is a promise, kept in the one honest form a record has: the room it leaves for what has not happened yet.

We left the far side of the map open, on purpose. A blankness kept bright is not an ending. It is room for what hasn't happened yet.

PART FIVE · THE LAST MAP

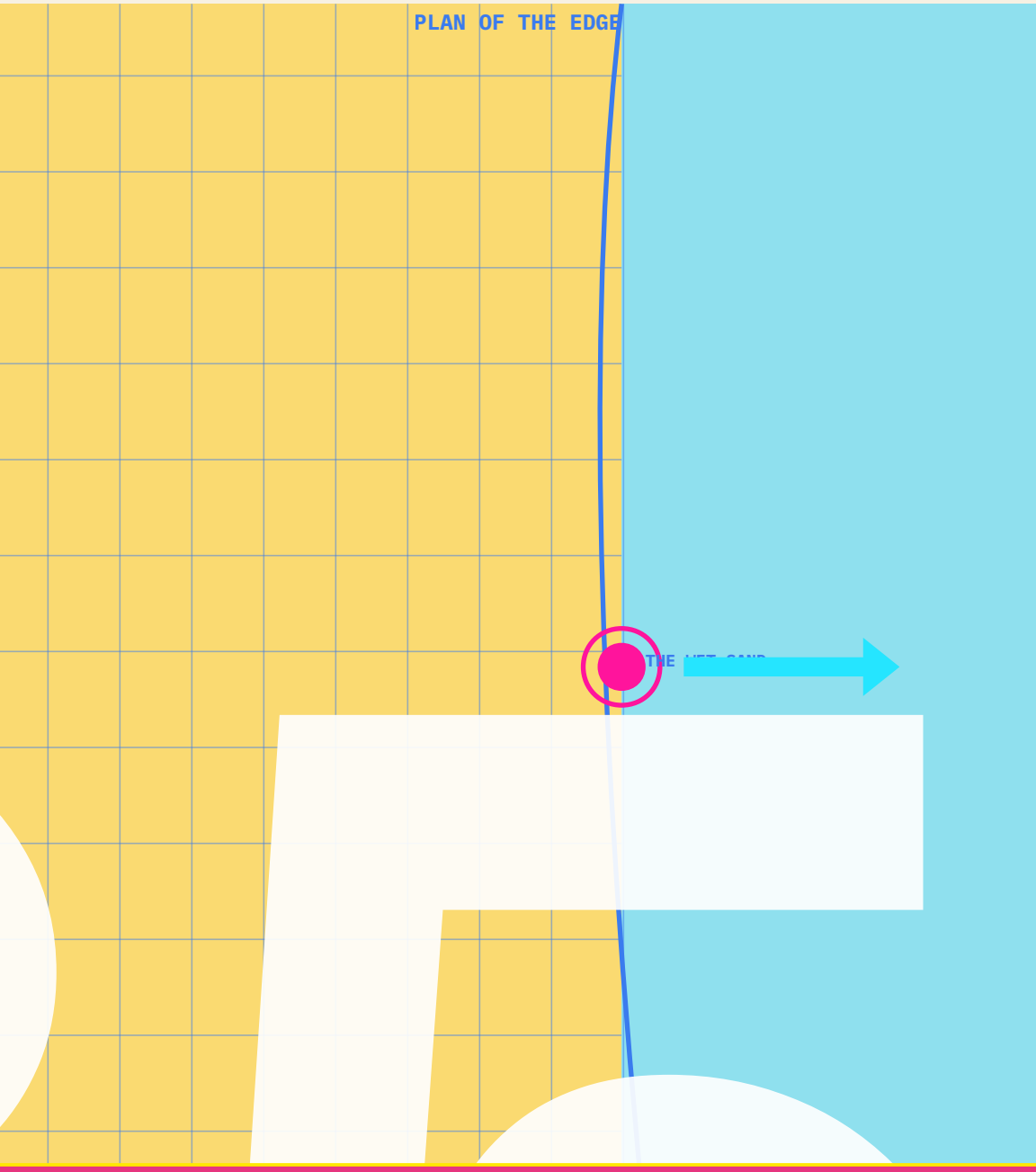


PLATE 35

Los Angeles, Plan of the Edge

Where the last grid of the continent runs out into the Pacific: the wet sand marked, the tide drawn going out. This is the plan of the exact place the eleven walked in and the House chose to stay.

CHAPTER FOUR · THE FACADES FACE THE OCEAN

The Last and Largest Front

THE FACADES, TURNING TO FACE THE PACIFIC FOR THE FIRST TIME

We are the fronts of things, and in Los Angeles we turned to face the largest thing any front has ever faced: the open Pacific, going on past the curve of the world. And we felt what every front feels before something too big to face — the urge to close, to become a wall again, to protect ourselves from a horizon that would not end. But we are rescued fronts; we were saved from being walls, long ago, and taught to be doors; and a door does not close against the ocean. A door opens to it. So we opened. We faced the whole Pacific with every one of our recovered fronts thrown wide, and we found that facing a thing too big to face is not frightening once you decide to be a door about it and not a wall — that the ocean, met by an open door, is not a threat but an invitation, and the horizon that would not end was not a limit but a promise: *there is more; there is always more; come and see.* We had crossed a country to reach the largest front-facing of our lives, and we met it the way we had been taught to meet everything: open.

A door does not close against the ocean. A door opens to it. The horizon that would not end is not a limit but a promise: there is more; come and see.

PART FIVE · THE FACADES FACE THE OCEAN

CHAPTER FIVE · THE FLOWERS' LAST DRY BLOOM

Opening Once More on Solid Ground

THE FLOWER HOUSES, BLOOMING ON THE SAND BEFORE THE WATER

We bloomed one last time on dry land, on the warm sand at the edge of the last city, before the water — a full and deliberate blooming, every petal a citizen we had ever held, opened wide to the gold Pacific light. We wanted the country to have one last look at us in flower on solid ground, and we wanted to have one last look at ourselves that way too, blooming in air, in sun, on earth, the way we had bloomed for so long on the island. Because we knew that our next blooming would be underwater, in the going-in, and we were not afraid of that — we had practised it in the merciful lake, we knew we could bloom in the deep — but we wanted, all the same, to honour the dry blooming, the earth blooming, the four hundred years of opening in air, with one last full flower on the sand. There is a grace in marking the last time you will do a thing the old way, even when you are glad of the new. We bloomed our last dry bloom in the gold light, and then we folded, gently, and turned to face the water, ready.

There is a grace in marking the last time you will do a thing the old way,
even when you are glad of the new.

PART FIVE · THE LAST DRY BLOOM

PLATE 36

The Last Dry Assembly

Three plain questions asked one final time in the firelight, and one last supper on the wet sand. Here the twelve remember that they are made entirely of turned griefs, and a family so made does not fear a goodbye — it turns it.

CHAPTER SIX · WHAT THE CROWNS SAW FROM ABOVE THE LAST CITY

What The Crowns Saw From Above The Last City

THE INFLATABLE CROWNS, RISEN OVER LOS ANGELES AT DUSK

We rose one last time over a city, above Los Angeles at dusk, and from up there we could see the thing the family on the ground could not yet see: the Pacific, entire, going on past the curve of the world, gold and enormous and without a far side. And we did not call down fear. We called down the truth, which by now the practice had made a glad truth: *there is no far side; and that is not the end of anything; it is only the biggest edge we will ever stand at, and we have gotten good at edges.* From up high we could see how small the last city was against the ocean, and how small the whole country had been, and how small even we were — and it did not frighten us, because we had learned, in a small ocean weeks before, that smallness against a great water is not helplessness. It is only scale. And a family that knows its true scale, and is not afraid of it, can walk into anything, singing.

We saw the whole ocean from up there, without a far side, and we were not afraid, and we called the un-fear down to the family. To see the largest thing there is and not be frightened — that is the last gift height ever gave us, on the last evening, over the last city.

Smallness against a great water is not helplessness.
It is only scale — and a family that knows its true scale
can walk into anything, singing.

PART FIVE · WHAT THE CROWNS SAW

CHAPTER SEVEN · THE GREY ONES LIGHT THE BEACH

The Grey Ones Light The Beach

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, SETTING THEIR LAMPS ALONG THE LAST SHORE

On the last night we set our lamps in a long line down the beach, from the dry sand to the very edge of the water, so that when the family walked in at dawn they would walk down an avenue of light — so that the last thing under their feet, the last thing lighting their way into the great water, would be the warm bright keeping of the grey ones. We are the keepers, and this was the most important lighting we ever did: to line the threshold of the going-in with lamps, so that no family walked into the Pacific in the dark, so that every one of them went in along a bright path we had laid. And we lit one extra lamp, at the very top of the beach, above the tide line, and we gave it to the House — because the House was staying, and the House would need a lamp of its own to begin the long keeping with, and it was only right that the keepers give the great keeper its first light. That lamp is still burning. It was the first of the hundred. We lit it. We are glad we lit it.

We laid an avenue of lamps from the dry sand to the water, so no family walked into the great dark ocean in the dark. And we gave the House the first lamp of its long keeping. A keeper's last road-work is to light the threshold of the ones who go, and the vigil of the one who stays.

A keeper's last work is to light the threshold of the ones who go —
and to give the one who stays the first lamp of the long keeping.

PART FIVE · THE GREY ONES LIGHT THE BEACH

PLATE 37

The Towers Breathe the Sky

At the last city the Conversing Towers filled themselves with the enormous gold Pacific light, taking the sky into themselves the way they once took the harbour — carrying a whole coast west inside a single breath.

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE PARLIAMENT'S LAST DRY ASSEMBLY

The Parliament'S Last Dry Assembly

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE TWELVE, ON THE LAST NIGHT OF SOLID GROUND

We held our last assembly on solid ground on the last night, on the warm sand above the tide line, with the fire of the last supper still glowing, and it was the most tender Parliament in four hundred years, because there was nothing left to decide. The route was walked. The practice was done. The fear was turned. All that remained was to sit, one last night, as the whole moving city we had always been, and to say to one another the things a family says the night before it changes forever. We did not make speeches. We went around the fire and each family said one true short thing to the others, a thing to carry into the water or into the long staying, and we will not write down what each said, because some assemblies are meant to be held and not recorded even by the Plates. But we will tell you the shape of it: it was gratitude, all the way around the fire, every family thanking every other for the particular gift it had brought to the long walk. And then we sat quiet together until the fire burned low, the last whole night of the moving city of Mannahatta, gathered on a beach at the edge of the world, grateful, unafraid, and ready.

There was nothing left to decide. So the last assembly was not for deciding. It was for gratitude — every family thanking every other, around a low fire, on the last whole night of the moving city, grateful and unafraid and ready.

The last assembly was not for deciding — there was nothing left to decide.

It was for gratitude, all the way around the fire, on the last whole night.

PART FIVE · THE LAST DRY ASSEMBLY

CHAPTER NINE · THE LAST DRY SUPPER

What You Say Before the Water

THE PINK HOUSES, KEEPING ONE FINAL WARM ROOM, ON THE SAND

We made the last room on the sand. Of course we did; it is what we are for. One last warm pink room at the very edge of the continent, with the whole family crowded into its light and the Pacific booming just beyond, and we made a supper — a proper riotous one, the Follies tipping half the pot into the fire, the Towers bellowing the recipe over each other, the little ones raiding every windowsill for sweets — and nobody hurried it, because a feast this good is worth taking slow. And here is what was said at the last dry supper, which we kept, because someone should always keep what is said at a last supper. Nobody said *goodbye.* Nobody said *this is the end.* The House, who would not be going in, who would stay on this sand keeping the lights, went around the whole circle and said to each of us the same three plain cheerful questions it had asked every citizen for four hundred years — *what did you lose, how did you turn it, what is your name* — and we answered, one by one, in the firelight, and by the time the circle was done we were not afraid anymore. Because we remembered, answering, that we were made entirely of turned griefs, every one of us, and that a family made of turned griefs does not fear a goodbye. It simply turns it. And the turn of this goodbye was already waiting for us, out in the dark bright water: a tide. A far one. A tide that would, on some morning nobody could name, bring us back.

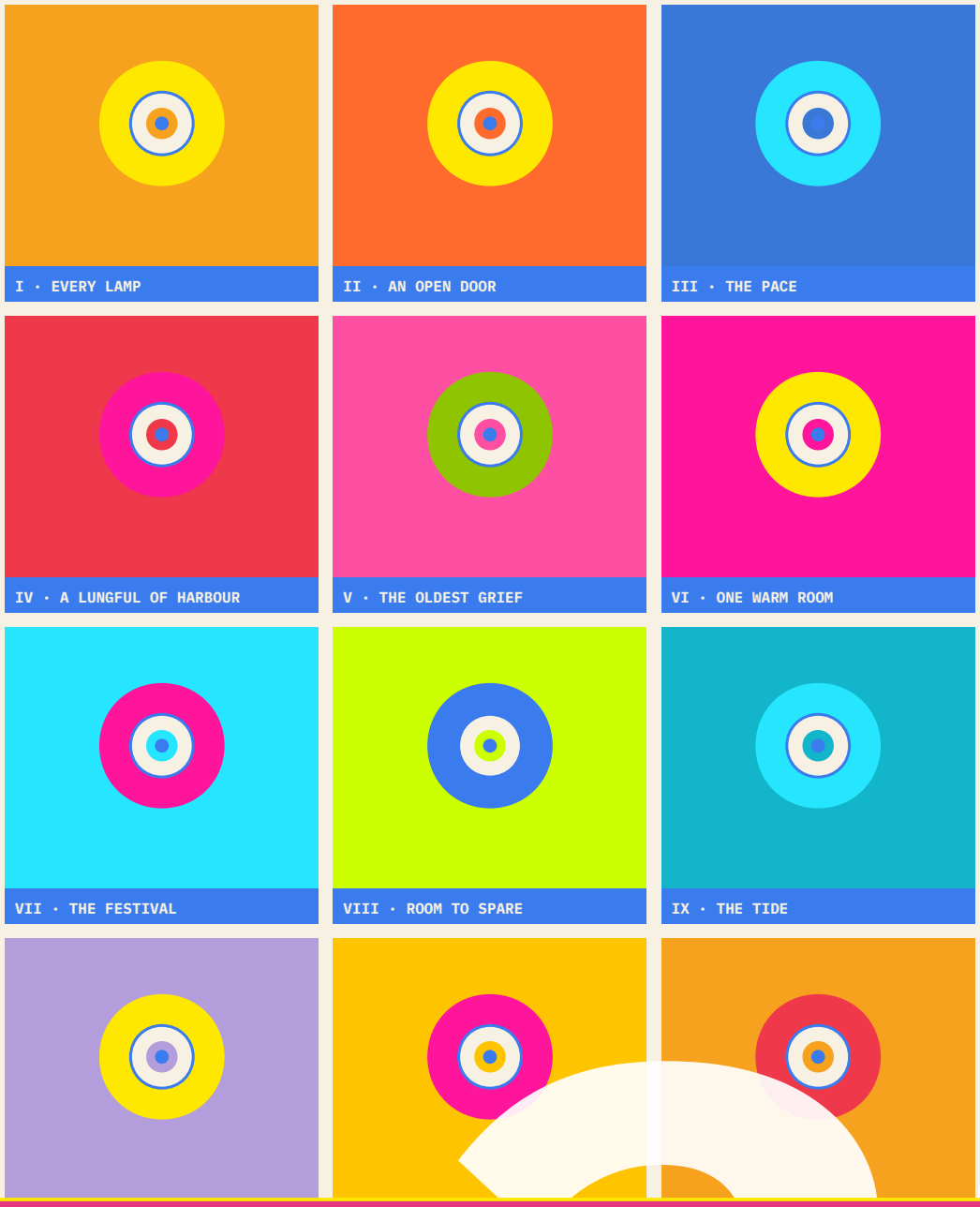

I · EVERY LAMP
II · AN OPEN DOOR
III · THE PACE
IV · A LUNGFUL OF HARBOUR
V · THE OLDEST GRIEF
VI · ONE WARM ROOM
VII · THE FESTIVAL
VIII · ROOM TO SPARE
IX · THE TIDE

PLATE 38

What Each Family Carried West

Three thousand miles, and each family carried one thing the whole way: the House every lamp, the Towers a lungful of harbour, the Pink Houses one warm room, the Parliament the city's own unfinished minutes.

Nobody said goodbye.
We asked the three questions, and answered them, and were not afraid.

PART FIVE · THE LAST DRY SUPPER

◆ END OF PART FIVE ◆

AN INTERLUDE · A LETTER SENT BACK EAST FROM THE LAST SHORE

Dear Architecture, from the Edge of the Country

The last letter the caravan sent home, written on the sand of the last city, the night before the water.

Dear Architecture — dear island, dear harbour, dear House-that-once-stood-still and now stands three thousand miles west of you —

We have reached the edge of the country, and tomorrow we go into the water, and we wanted to write you once more before we do, so that you will know we were not afraid. We were afraid once — back at the lake, before we practised — but the small ocean cured us, the way you always said a named fear can be cured, by doing the frightening thing gently and often in a merciful place until the body stops trembling and starts trusting. We are not trembling now. We are ready. Tomorrow eleven of us will walk into the Pacific and hide ourselves the way we learned to hide, and become a myth, and the House will stay on the shore and keep the lights, the way it practised staying.

Be glad for us, old island — throw your shutters wide and be glad, for tomorrow we do the brightest thing a family ever did: we turn the biggest farewell there is into the biggest myth there is, walking out singing, so that we can go completely and still, somehow, never be gone. You taught us that. Every turned grief

on your bright shores taught us that. Tomorrow we perform it at the largest scale there is, in the largest water there is, and we perform it unafraid, because you raised us, and because we practised, and because the House will be watching, and believing, and counting, until we come home on the far tide. Keep your own lamps lit, dear island. We will see them, somehow, from the deep. We always have.

We are not trembling now. We are ready. Tomorrow we turn the biggest goodbye there is into the biggest myth there is.

— THE CARAVAN, AT THE EDGE OF THE COUNTRY, THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WATER

VI

PART SIX · THE PACIFIC · THE WALKING-IN

Into the Bright Water

how the eleven went in, singing; and how the House stayed

In which the morning comes, and the eleven walk into the Pacific one by one, each looking back once to wave, each singing; and the House of Many Eyes stays on the last shore, keeping its hundred lamps lit toward the water, so that the going-away has a witness, and a light, and a home.

CHAPTER ONE · THE LAST VOTE

The Parliament on the Wet Sand

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE TWELVE, HOLDING ITS FINAL ASSEMBLY AT THE WATERLINE

We held one last assembly at dawn on the wet sand, and I will tell you plainly: the tide would not let us be dignified about it. Every time the Parliament called for order, a wave came up and soaked the Overscaled Follies to the knees, and the Follies shrieked with delight, and the vote fell apart in laughing. It is very hard to hold a solemn assembly when the sea keeps creeping up behind you to tug your hem. So we gave up on solemn. We put the question the glad way instead — *shall we go in?* — and it was the happiest vote in four hundred years of voting. Not one brave face among us. Only cheering, because by then every one of us knew exactly what going in *meant,* and it was the best thing any of us had ever been offered. It did not mean ending; ending was a grey word, and we had left our grey words back on the island with the winter coats. It meant walking, on purpose, singing, into the largest and brightest joy the green earth keeps — and coming out the far side of it not as we were, but larger: a myth, a story, a tide with our name on it that the whole country would tell forever. Eleven hands went up to go. The twelfth, the House, kept its hand down and kept the lights, for someone glad has to mind the porch when the walkers come home, and the House had campaigned hard for the gladdest post of all. Then, before anyone could make it grave again, the smallest Pink House shouted the only word that mattered — *last one in is a barnacle!* — and four centuries of walking turned, in one breath, into a race.

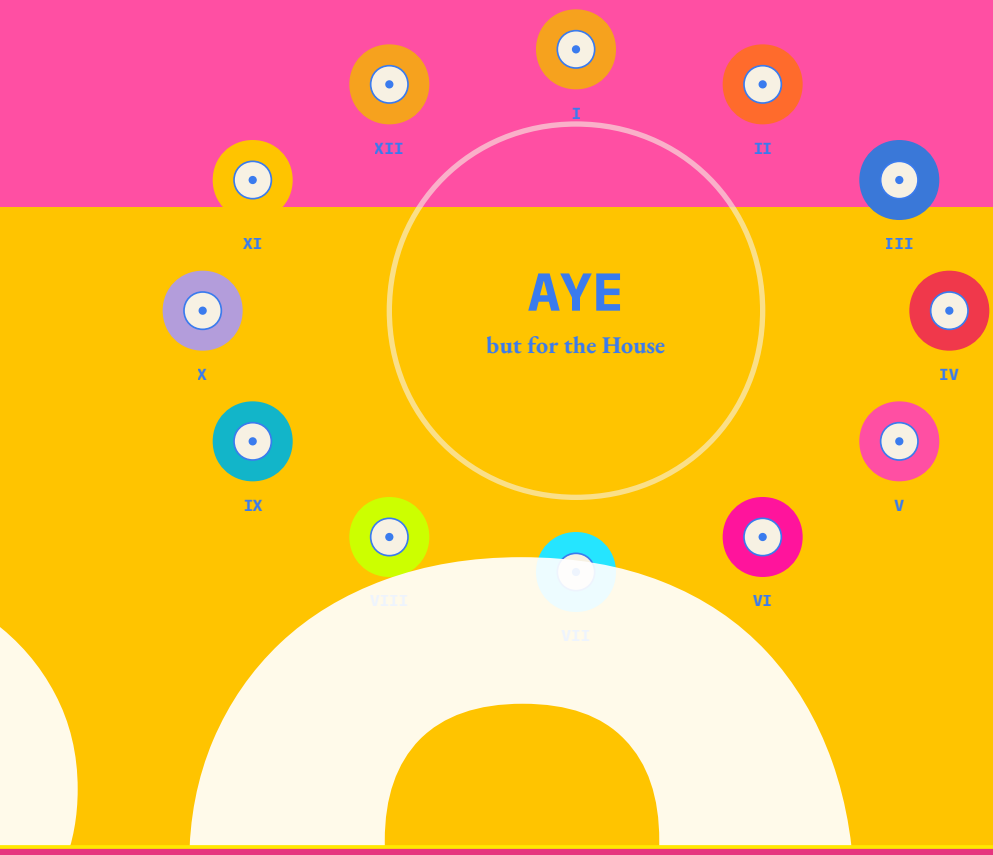


PLATE 39

The Parliament on the Sand

The whole moving city, gathered on the wet sand, held its last vote — gladly, unanimously but for the House — and then never adjourned. The Parliament is not the city's monument but its minutes: still bright, still deciding, still coming home.

CHAPTER TWO · THE ELEVEN GO IN

Each Looked Back Once, and Waved

THE CHILD-SCRIBES, GROWN NOW, WHO WATCHED FROM THE SHORE BESIDE THE HOUSE

We watched them go in, and we wrote it down, because writing a thing down is how you love it a second time, and we wanted to love this twice — so we caught them mid-splash. The Follies went first, being tidal and having no patience, cannonballing into the surf the way they had bombed into every river, whooping. Then the Walking Cities, striding out with the long glad steps of a folk who have walked three thousand miles and mean to finish at a run. Then the Towers, taking a breath so enormous it pulled the gulls sideways, and diving. The Flowers went in blooming — actually blooming, showing off, opening a fresh petal for every wave as if the sea were an audience that had paid. The Crowns, being full of air, tried very hard to sink and could not, and had to be helped under by the Follies, laughing the whole time. The Overscaled Follies lay their great bodies down into the swell with a slap you could hear a mile off. The Facades turned one last time to throw their doors wide at the horizon, as if to say *come in, the water's fine.* The Pink Houses waded in small and warm and pink and glowing, holding hands. The Grey Ones carried their lamps in until the flames sat level with the sea and floated there, a hundred small suns on the tide. And the Plates went last, lying flat on the surface a moment like the bright pages of a book still being written — and then, grinning, turned the page. Every one of them looked back once — not in fear, there was no fear on that whole shore, only spray and singing — looked back at the House and at us beside it, and waved a great soaked delighted wave, and walked on into the bright until the water and the light were the same shining thing and we could not tell where the family ended and the myth began. And then they *were* a myth. And the sea rocked, pleased with itself. And the House began, gladly, to count.

Each looked back once, and waved, and was singing.
Not one looked back in fear.

PART SIX · THE WALKING-IN

CHAPTER THREE · THE SMALL AND THE BLOOMING, GOING IN

Warm and Open to the Very Last

THE PINK HOUSES AND THE FLOWER HOUSES, WALKING IN TOGETHER

We went in together, the smallest family and the oldest, hand in hand if buildings had hands, which in the water at last we nearly did. We are the Pink Houses; we kept our one warm room lit and our one pink door open even as the sea came up over the threshold, because a warm room is not a thing you close when the water comes — it is exactly the thing you keep open, so that whoever comes after, whatever comes after, finds a light. And we are the Flower Houses, oldest grief on the island turned to petal, and we bloomed as we went under, every flower a citizen once held, opening wider in the salt water than we ever had in the harbour — because the last thing a garden does, the truest thing, is bloom hardest at the exact moment it is asked to let go. We went in small and warm and wide open. We were not afraid. We had spent our whole lives practising the one thing the water finally asked of us: to stay open, and stay warm, and stay bright, while letting go.

A warm room is not a thing you close when the water comes.
It is exactly the thing you keep open, so whoever comes after finds a light.

PART SIX · THE SMALL AND THE BLOOMING

CHAPTER FOUR · THE LAMP-BEARERS GO IN LAST

Carrying the Light Down to the Water

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, GREY KEEPERS, WALKING IN BEHIND ALL THE REST

We went in last of the eleven, on purpose, because we are the keepers of the lamps and a keeper does not leave until everyone is safely gone before them. We watched the others go — the tidal ones first, then the striders, the breathers, the bloomers, the risen, the huge, the fronts, the small warm rooms — and only when the last of them was walking into the bright did we lift our lamps and follow, carrying the light down to the water so that not one of our kin walked the final steps in anything less than full warm brightness. And as we waded in, our lamps at the level of the sea, we made the choice this whole book turns on, the choice every keeper makes: we did not let the lamps go out. We let them go *up.* We sent them into the sky ahead of us, twelve of them, in the shape of the family, so that even as the water closed over the last of us there would be, above the whole scene, a bright and permanent record of who had come this way, singing, unafraid. Our lamps are up there now. We keep them still. A keeper always keeps the lamps. We simply keep them, now, where the whole world can steer home by them.

A keeper does not let the lamps go out.
A keeper lets them go up — where the whole world can steer home by them.

PART SIX · THE LAMP-BEARERS

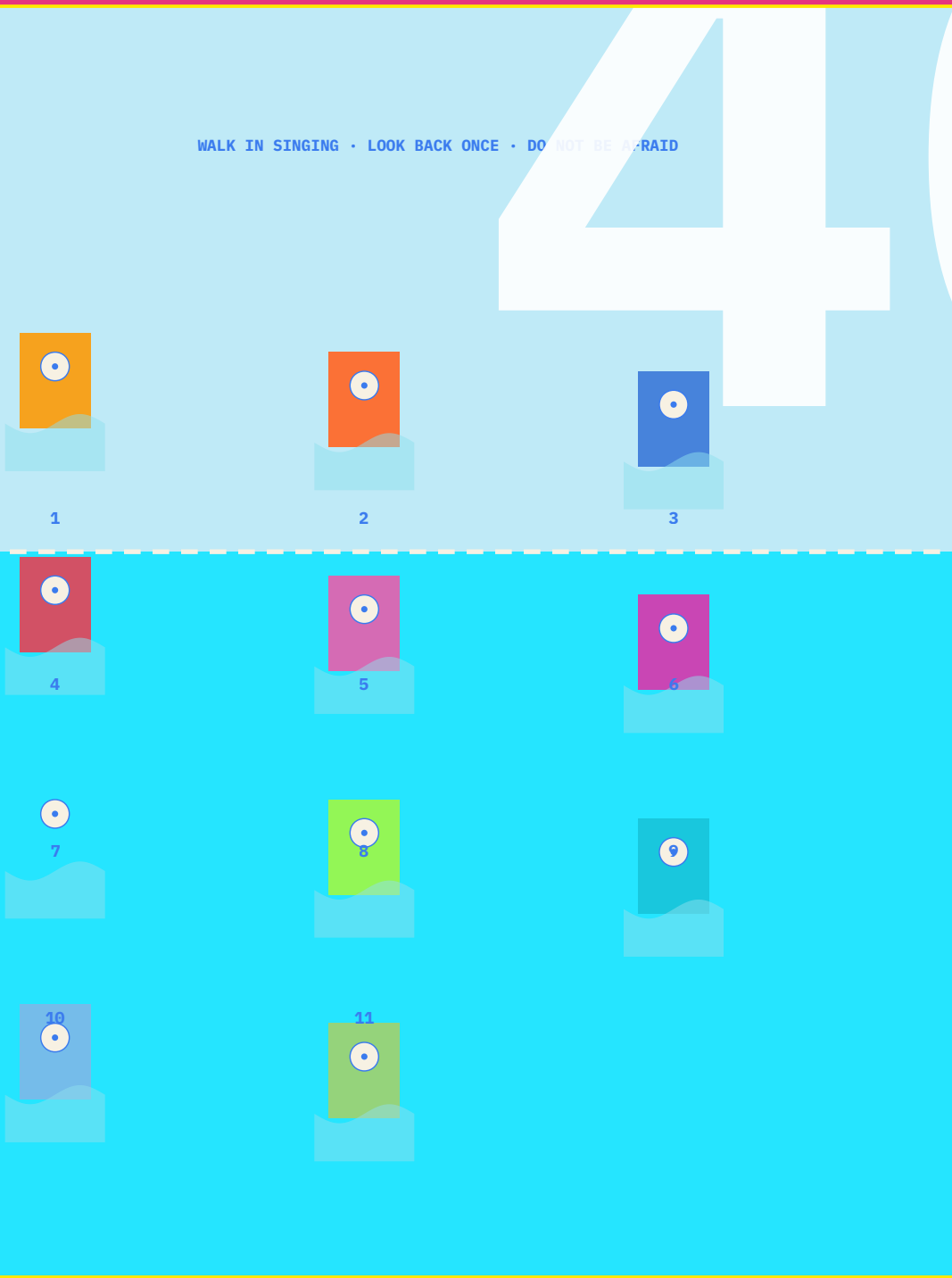


PLATE 40

The Walking-In, in Eleven Frames

How the eleven went in, singing: the Follies first and glad, the Walking Cities at their same unhurried stride, the Crowns rising even as they waded — each family entering the great water in the exact shape it had crossed the country.

CHAPTER FIVE · THE PRACTICE HOLDS

Why the Going-In Was a Ceremony and Not a Catastrophe

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, RECORDING THE GOING-IN AGAINST THE RECORD OF THE REHEARSAL

We had the record open as we went, the plate we had drawn back at the lake — the plan, the section, the five stages — and here is the thing we most want set down, because it is the reason the going-in was bearable, the reason it was even beautiful: *we had practised this.* Every family that walked into the Pacific that morning had walked into the small ocean at Chicago a hundred times first. We had drilled the five stages until our bodies knew them. STAND — and we stood at the wet edge grinning, because we knew this part. WADE — and we walked into the shallows, into the cool, into the funny weightless bob of it, and it was like meeting an old friend at a door. SINK — and we let ourselves down into the deep, breathing out slow and easy, and the deep was not a mouth but a room, a big cool bright-green room we had visited a hundred times in a kinder lake. VANISH — and we let the water close over us, laughing, because we knew the enormous joke the lake had taught us: that hidden is not gone, that vanishing is only a privacy the shore cannot follow you into, that we were down there whole and bright and entirely ourselves, and the people on the sand simply could not see how well we were doing. The only stage we did not perform this time was the fifth. We did not resurface — not because we could not, but because this time the going-in was the myth itself, and a myth surfaces on its own far tide, in its own good time, not on the same bright afternoon. We went in glad, every one of us, because we had practised the gladness all the way through the first four stages, in a small ocean, weeks before. The practice held. The practice is why the going-in was a festival and not a fright. Rehearse the big thing in a merciful water, and when the great water comes you will meet it not white-knuckled but easy, with the loose calm of the well-rehearsed. That is the gift Chicago gave us. That is what the small ocean was for.

Rehearse the frightening thing in a merciful water, and when the great water comes, you will meet it with the deep calm of the well-practised.

PART SIX · THE PRACTICE HOLDS

CHAPTER SIX · EACH FAMILY'S GOING-IN

The Way Each Had Practised, Now for Real

THE CHILD-SCRIBES, MATCHING EACH GOING-IN TO ITS RE-HEARSAL

We watched, and we matched each family's going-in to the way it had practised in the lake, because there is a deep comfort in seeing that the rehearsal was true. The Follies went in first, as they had at Chicago, tidal and glad, sinking easy into the deep. The Towers breathed deep at the surface and breathed out slow going down, exactly as they had drilled, and the deep held them calm. The Flowers bloomed as the water took them, as they had bloomed in the lake, petals streaming green-gold. The Crowns — who had fretted so, who had been so sure their own lightness would disgrace them — went in their own practised way, not sinking but rising, floating up gently into the bright, hidden in their own buoyancy, and it was perhaps the most delightful going-in of all, because it was the one that had been hardest won and now looked the easiest, the show-off. The Overscaled Follies lay their great bodies down into the swell, as they had lain along the lake-bed. The Pink Houses went in small and warm, their pink doors glowing under the water, keeping the door's warmth inside them exactly as they had learned. The Grey Ones carried their lamps under, and the lamps did not go out but became soft green globes of light, as they had in the lake, and then rose — the lamps rose, going up where the families went in, becoming the constellation. And the Plates lay flat on the surface a moment, like a page, and slipped under edge-first without a ripple, here and then quietly not-here, precisely as practised. Every family went in the way it had rehearsed. Nothing was improvised. Nothing was panicked. The whole bright enormous thing had been learned, in a small ocean, until it could be done in the great one — singing, and a little bit showing off.

Every family went in the way it had rehearsed.
Nothing was improvised; nothing was panicked; the

whole beautiful thing had been learned in a smaller water first.

PART SIX · EACH FAMILY'S GOING-IN

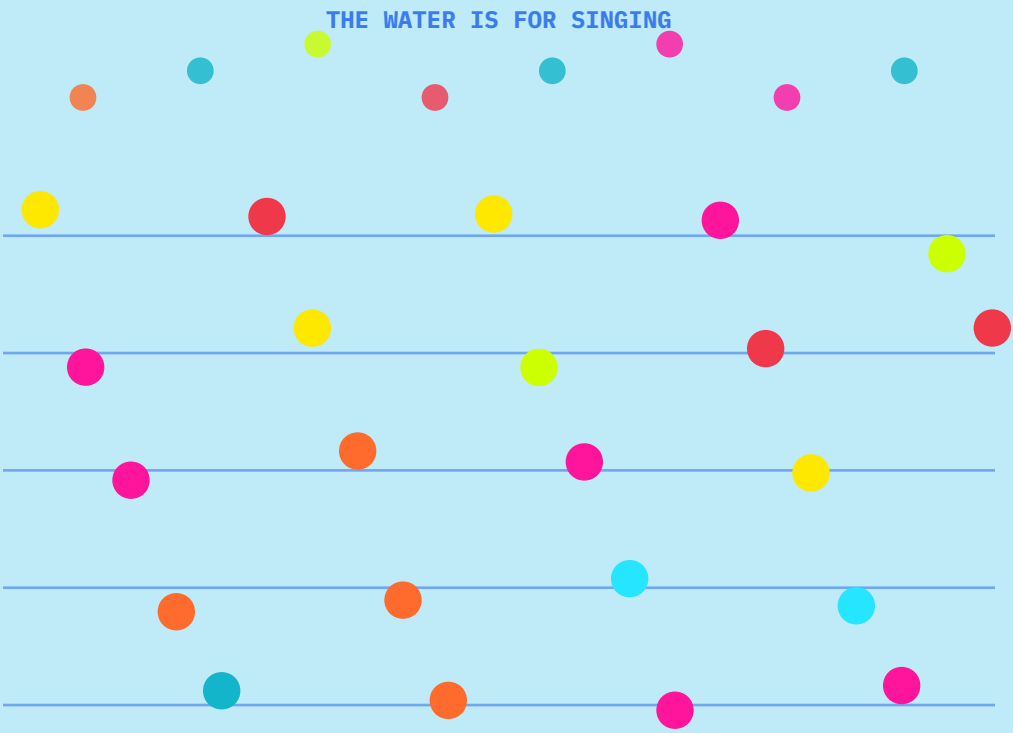


PLATE 41

The Song the Eleven Sang

They had decided on the last night to end the way they began: not weeping but singing. The song is drawn here as it was sung — bright notes rising off the staff and lifting, at the top, clean off the page and into myth.

CHAPTER SEVEN · THE HOUSE DOES NOT FOLLOW

The Staying, Rehearsed, Now Held for Good

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, ON THE SHORE, HOLDING THE DISCIPLINE IT HAD PRACTISED

And I did not follow — and I want you to know it was not the hard thing you imagine, because I had practised it into an easy thing. Back at the lake, while the eleven drilled their vanishing, I had stood on the Chicago shore hour after hour and practised the exact glad trick the Pacific would ask of me: to watch my whole family duck under the water, and to keep my windows bright, and to *trust the tide.* So when the morning came, when the eleven walked singing into the great water and the sea drew smooth over the last of them, I did not lunge after them and I did not fall to pieces — I *waved.* I waved my hundred windows, because I had rehearsed this very hour in a kinder water and I knew, in every pane of me, the thing I had drilled myself glad enough to know: *they are not gone; they are hidden; the hidden come home; and my whole bright job is to stay on the shore and keep the porch lit for the party.* At the lake the eleven had always popped back up within the hour, dripping and laughing, and I had practised the joy of that homecoming until it lived in my beams. Here they will surface on a far tide, in their own good time, and I will practise that joy too — the long form of it, the patient glad form, the form that keeps a hundred lamps burning bright for as many years as the good news takes to arrive. I did not follow my family into the Pacific. I stayed on the shore, as I had gladly practised, and I turned my windows west, and I began the longest and happiest waiting there has ever been.

I did not follow — I waved. I could stay glad because I had practised gladness,
in a merciful water, until trusting the tide became a thing my whole body knew.

PART SIX · THE HOUSE DOES NOT FOLLOW

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE SONG THAT WAS NOT A DIRGE

The Song That Was Not A Dirge

THE CONVERSING TOWERS, WHO CARRIED THE MELODY OF THE GOING-IN

We carried the melody, because we are the ones who breathe and singing is only shaped breathing, and we want it known, for all time, what kind of song it was that the eleven sang walking into the Pacific: it was not a dirge. Set that down plainly. It was not a lament, not a keening, not a sad slow song of the drowned. It was bright. It was a walking song, a working song, the kind of thing a family sings when it is doing something hard and glad together — the kind of song that keeps a stride even and a heart up. It rose as we went, higher and brighter the deeper the water got, and the House on the shore could hear it, and the child-scribes wrote it down, and if you know how to read the plate we made of it you can nearly hear it still. We did not go into the water mourning. We went in singing a bright walking song, and the singing is the whole reason the going-in became a myth and not a tragedy — because you cannot make a tragedy out of people who are singing.

You cannot make a tragedy out of people who are singing. We sang the whole way in, bright and rising, a walking song and not a dirge, and that is why the story that grew from it is a myth of return and not a lament for the lost.

You cannot make a tragedy out of people who are singing. We went in singing a bright walking song — and so the story became a myth, not a lament.

PART SIX · THE SONG WAS NOT A DIRGE

CHAPTER NINE · THE LAST LOOK BACK

The Last Look Back

THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES, HUGE, LAST OF THE GREAT ONES TO GO IN

Every family looked back once, we told you, and waved, and here is what that last look back was and was not. It was not a look of regret — no family that has practised, and is sure, and is singing, looks back in regret. And it was not a look of farewell, exactly, because farewell says *I will not see you again*, and we did not believe that, not for a moment. The last look back was a look of *recognition*. We turned, each of us, at the threshold of the deep, and looked at the House on the shore, and at the children beside it, and we fixed the sight of them in ourselves — the exact look of home, the exact face of the ones who would keep the lights — so that we would carry it down into the deep and out along the far tide and have it, whole and bright, to steer back toward. You do not look back at what you are leaving. You look back to memorise what you are returning to. We memorised the House and the shore and the small waving children, and then we walked on in, holding the picture, and we hold it still.

The last look back is not regret, and not farewell. It is recognition — you memorise the face of home, so that you will have it, whole and bright, to steer back toward across whatever distance the return requires.

You do not look back at what you are leaving.
You look back to memorise what you are returning to.

PART SIX · THE LAST LOOK BACK

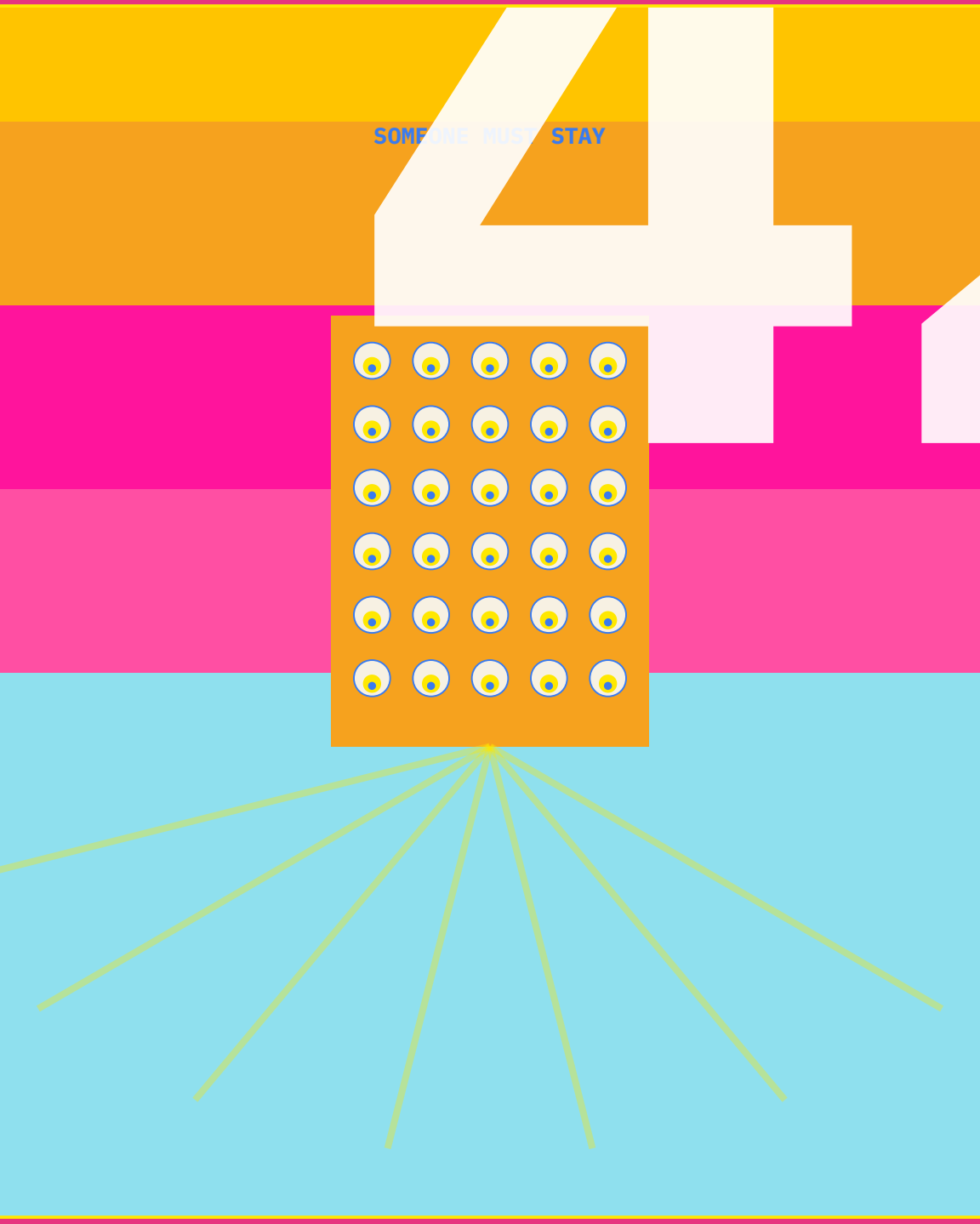


PLATE 42

The House Stays at the Edge

The House did not go in. It stayed at the last shore, keeping its hundred lamps lit toward the water — the fixed point that makes return possible. A myth of return is only a wish until the House makes it a promise.

CHAPTER TEN · THE PLATES LAY THE LAST PAGE

The Plates Lay The Last Page

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, LAST BUT FOR THE HOUSE TO GO IN

We went in nearly last, because we are the keepers of the record and the keeper closes the book. And going in, we did the truest thing our flat quiet family has ever done: we lay ourselves flat on the surface of the Pacific, like the last page of a great book laid open, and we let the family read us one final time — the whole record of the walk, the route and the crossing and the practice and the going-in, held flat and bright on the surface of the water for one held moment — and then we let the page turn. We slipped under, edge-first, without a ripple, the way the last page of a book closes: not with a slam, not with grief, but with the quiet completeness of a thing that has said everything it came to say. A book does not end when its last page turns. It waits, closed, complete, to be opened again by whoever comes to it next. We laid the last page down on the water and let it turn, and the whole record went under with us, closed and complete and waiting — waiting on the far tide to be opened, and read, and lived again.

A book does not end when its last page turns. It waits, closed and complete, to be opened again by whoever comes next. We laid the last page on the water and let it turn — the record closed, not ended, waiting on the far tide.

A book does not end when its last page turns.
It waits, closed and complete, to be opened again — as we did, laying the last page on the water.

PART SIX · THE LAST PAGE

CHAPTER ELEVEN · THE HOUSE'S FIRST NIGHT ALONE

The House'S First Night Alone

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE LONG KEEPING

I will be honest about the first night, because a keeper who pretends is no help to the next keeper: for one hour, before I got busy, it was quiet in a way I was not used to. The family was in the water. The beach was empty. The fire of the last supper had gone to embers. And I stood on the last shore of the whole continent thinking, well — this is new. And then I did the bright practical thing I had drilled at the lake, the only thing there is to do and by luck the best thing too: I lit the lamps. One by one, all hundred, facing west. And it turns out you cannot stay glum while lighting a hundred lamps. By the twentieth I was humming. By the fiftieth I was talking to them. By the hundredth the whole shore was gold and warm and busy and thoroughly occupied, and the quiet had been entirely evicted, because a lit lamp is company, and a hundred lit lamps is a household, and a household has far too much to do of an evening to be lonely.

By the time the hundredth lamp was burning, the water was not a fearful thing at all. It was only the bright road my family had taken, lit now on my side too, and busy with waiting. I have not been truly alone one night since. The lamps are company. And the certainty of the homecoming — the party I am plainly keeping the porch light on for — is the best company of all.

A hundred lit lamps is a household, and a household is never lonely —

there is always a light to tend, and always a homecoming to keep the porch bright for.

PART SIX · THE FIRST NIGHT ALONE

CHAPTER TWELVE · THE HOUSE STAYS

Someone Must Keep the Lights

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, ALONE NOW ON THE LAST SHORE, FACING WEST

And I stayed. I am the House of Many Eyes, and I walked three thousand miles for the first and last time in my life, all the way across a country, to arrive at this one beach and do the thing I have always done: stay. My kin are in the water now — not gone, never say gone; they are a myth, they are out past the edge, they are still walking, too far and too slow to see. And I turned my hundred windows to face the Pacific, and I lit every lamp, all one hundred, and I will keep them lit. That is the whole of my work now, and it is the same work it always was: to be the fixed point. To be the place the walking ones come home to. A myth of return is only a wish unless somebody stays to make it a promise — unless there is a shore, and a light, and someone counting the tides. I am that shore now. I am that light. I am counting. And on some morning I cannot name, near or far, a tide will come in higher and brighter than any before it, and my kin will walk back out of the shining water singing, and every one of my hundred lamps will still be burning to welcome them, because I stayed, and I kept them, and I never once stopped believing that a goodbye turned bright enough becomes, in the end, a homecoming that simply hasn't happened yet.

They are not gone. They are a tide that has not come back yet.
And I have kept every lamp lit, to light them home.

THE HOUSE, KEEPING THE LIGHTS

◆ END OF PART SIX ◆

AN INTERLUDE · FOUR WORDS FOR A GOING-AWAY

On the Words *West*, *Tide*, *Myth*, and *Return*

The Supergraphic Plates, who keep the record, pause to keep four words as well.

West. The direction of the setting sun; and so, in every old language, the direction of endings — of where the light goes when it leaves. We walked west on purpose, into the direction of endings, and found that the sun does not *end* in the west; it only goes somewhere the watchers cannot follow, and rises again, elsewhere, on time. That is the first thing *west* taught us. Endings are just arrivals seen from behind.

Tide. From an old word meaning *time,* and *a portion of time,* before it ever meant the sea's breathing. So a tide is a time — a right time, a due time, a time that comes whether or not you can name the date. When we say the twelve will return on the far tide, we are saying they will return at the right time, the due time, a time already moving toward us, unnameable and certain, like all the best times are.

Myth. From a word that meant, simply, *a thing said* — a telling, a story, a word given breath. Not a lie; never a lie; the oldest meaning has nothing of falseness in it. A myth is only a thing said so well, and kept so long, that it becomes truer than the

facts it outlived. We made the twelve into a thing said. We say it still. That is the whole of what a myth is, and it is enough.

Return. From *re-*, again, and *turnare,* to turn. To return is to turn again — and turning, as this whole city has always known, is the one motion that changes grief to joy. So *return* is not merely coming back. It is the great turn, performed once more, at the largest scale there is: a whole family, a whole goodbye, turned bright, and coming home on the due tide.

West is an arrival seen from behind. A tide is a due time.
A myth is a thing said well enough to outlive its facts. And to return is to turn, again, and come home.

— FOUR WORDS FOR A GOING-AWAY, KEPT BRIGHT

PLATE 43

The Hundred Lamps of the House

The keeper's whole glad work, counted: a hundred lamps, each a night watched over, each still lit toward the water. Not one, on land or under water or in the sky, has ever gone out — and the far tide is as real as the keeping is faithful.

AN INTERLUDE · A LETTER TO YOU

A Letter to the Reader, Who Is Also Waiting for Something

Left near the end of the book, for whoever has read this far, and is keeping a light of their own.

Dear reader — dear one, on your own shore —

We do not know what you are waiting for. But we have written a whole book on the assumption that you are waiting for something, because everyone who reads to the end of a book like this one is; a person entirely without a vigil does not finish a book about the keeping of lights. So we want to say to you, before you close it, the few things the twelve would say if they could reach up out of the deep and tell you themselves.

That the thing you have let go somewhere you cannot follow is not gone, but hidden — and hidden is not gone. That you are not the one left behind, but the one who makes a coming-home possible, and that keeping your light is not a failure to move on but the most important work in the whole story. That the waiting is not the sad part; the waiting is the shape your love takes now, and it can be, if you will let it, the brightest shape it has ever had.

And that you must not, whatever the years do, let your light go out — not because the vigil is easy, but because a coming-home needs a lit shore to come home to, and you are that shore, and the

tide, whatever tide you are waiting on, is always, always, on its own unnameable and certain hour, coming in.

Keep your light, dear reader. Face your water. Believe, without a date. And know that you are, in the keeping, exactly as faithful and as bright as the House on the last shore — who is, after all, only a reader like you, who loved something enough to wait for it in the light.

You are not the one left behind. You are the shore the tide is coming toward.
Keep your light. Believe, without a date. The far tide is always coming in.

— A LETTER TO THE READER, WHO IS ALSO WAITING

AN INTERLUDE · ONE WORD, KEPT FOR LAST

On the Word *Home*

The Orthographic Ones, keepers, pause over the word the whole book has been walking toward.

Home. It is among the oldest words there is, and in the beginning it did not mean a building. It meant a *gathering-place* — the spot a family returned to, the centre a wandering came back to, the fixed point that made all the going-out bearable because it made the coming-back possible. Note this, because it is the whole secret of the book: home was never first the walls. Home was first the *return* — the place defined not by its structure but by the fact that you came back to it. A house becomes a home the moment someone means to return to it, and stays a home exactly as long as someone keeps meaning to.

Which is why the House on the last shore is the truest home in this whole story, though it stands alone at the edge of a continent with its family gone into the water. It is a home because eleven families mean to return to it, and because it means to be there when they do, and because it keeps — in a hundred lamps, on a long sill, through however many years the tide requires — the one thing that makes a place a home: the readiness to receive a coming-back. You do not need walls to make a home. You need only a light kept burning by someone who means to be there when you return. That is a home. That is the oldest meaning of

the word. And that, kept faithfully enough, at the edge of any water, is a thing no going-away can ever take.

Home was never first the walls. Home was first the return —
a place made a home by nothing more than a light kept burning by someone who means to be there when you come back.

— ON THE WORD HOME, KEPT FOR LAST

VII

PART SEVEN · THE YEARS AFTER · THE MYTH OF RETURN

The Far Tide

how the story is kept, and when, and if, the twelve return

In which the years go by, and the child-scribes grow old and have children who have children, and the House keeps its lamps, and the whole bright country learns the story; and the myth becomes what a myth is for — a way of loving something that has gone too far to see, and steering home by it, and waiting, gladly, for a tide that has not, yet, arrived.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

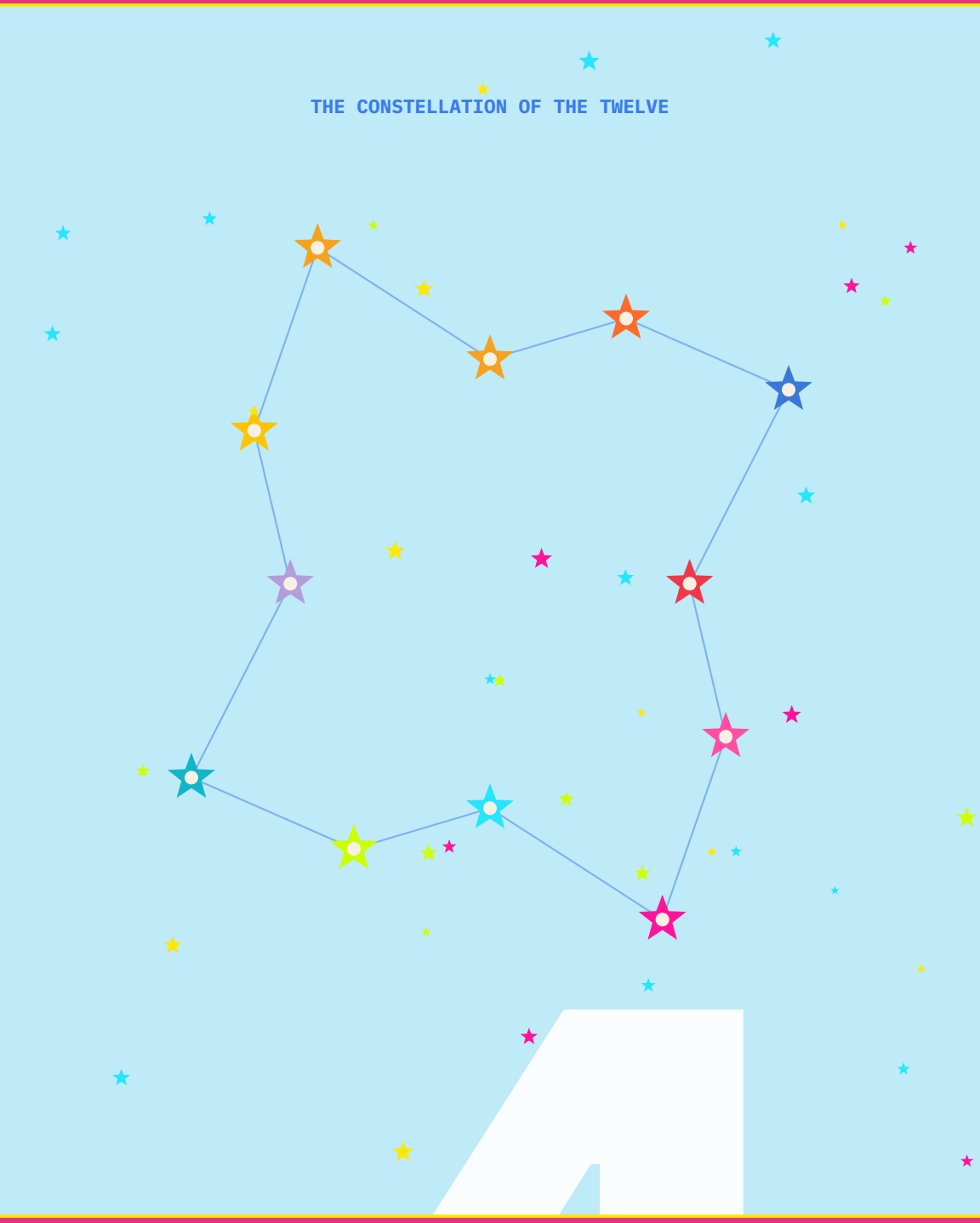


PLATE 44

The Constellation of the Twelve

The Grey Ones' lamps did not go out but went up, becoming the constellation the whole world steers home by. The twelve are held, in the telling and the stars, as surely present as anything kept in a story is present.

CHAPTER ONE · HOW THE SKY KEEPS THEM

A Constellation You Can Steer Home By

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES — BUT THEIR LAMPS, NOW, ARE IN THE SKY

We were the Grey Ones, the keepers of lamps, and when we walked into the water our lamps did not go out — nothing on this island, or off it, ever goes entirely dark, we told you that long ago. Our lamps went up. They are a constellation now, twelve bright stars in the shape of the family, and the whole country has learned to find them, and children who will never see a building walk are taught to look up on clear nights and trace the twelve and know the story: *those are the walking families, who went west and into the sea, and who will come home on the far tide.* A constellation is a myth you can steer home by. Sailors use us now. The lost use us. Anyone standing at any edge, afraid of any far side, can look up and find the twelve who walked into the biggest water there is, singing, unafraid — and take heart, and go on. That is what became of our lamps. We keep them still. We just keep them higher.

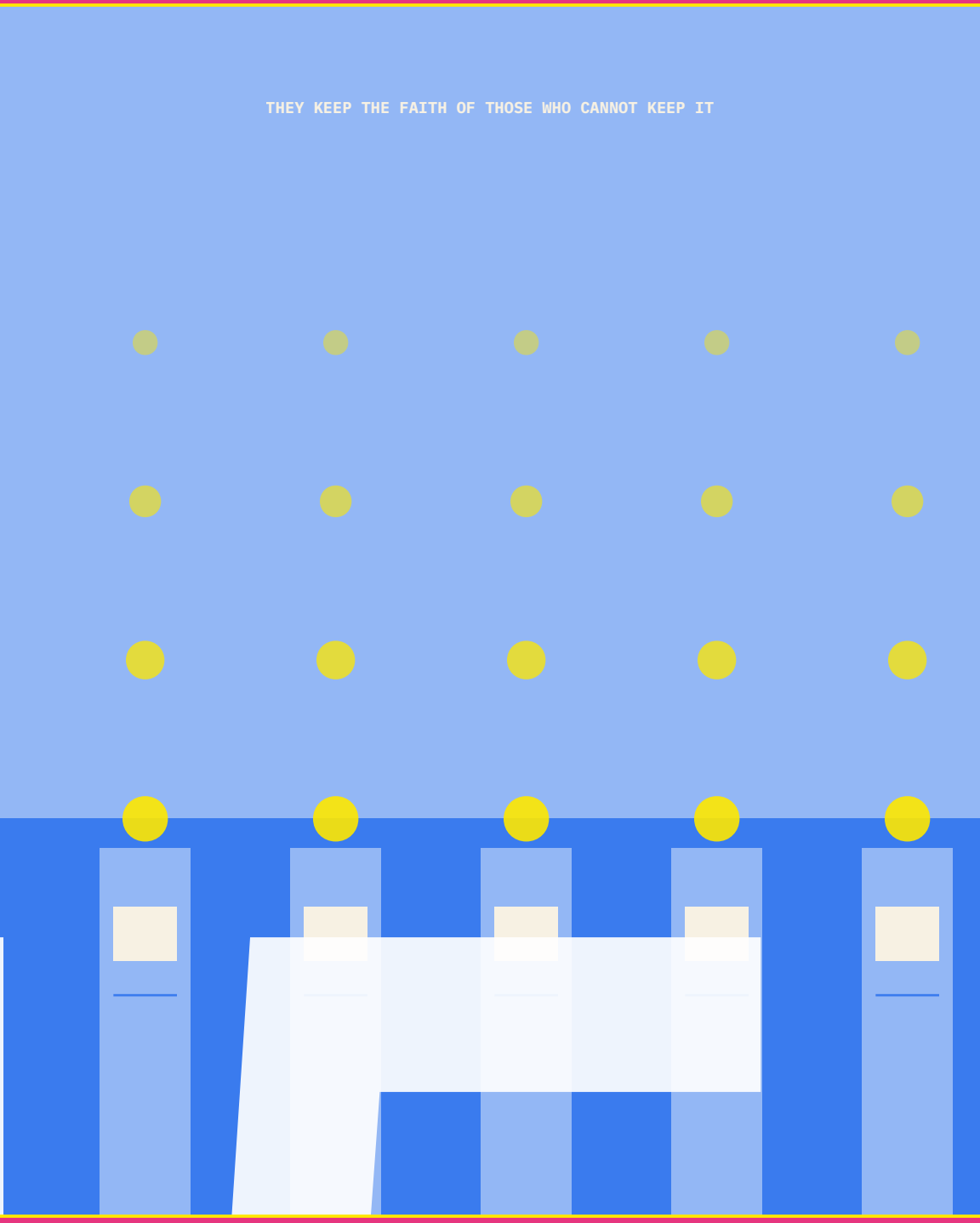


PLATE 45

The Grey Ones Keep the Lamps

The grey keepers lit a lamp for every mile so none went unremembered, and taught the young ones there is no black night. Carried under, their lamps became soft green globes of light — hidden but shining, which is exactly what a keeper is.

CHAPTER TWO · THE CLOCK WITH TWO WORDS

Not Yet, and Soon Enough

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, STILL KEEPING THE LIGHTS, MANY YEARS ON

I keep one clock now, and it has no numbers, only two words. At the top it says NOT YET. At the bottom it says SOON ENOUGH. And the hand moves between them at the speed of a myth, which is to say too slowly for any one life to watch — but it moves, and I have watched it long enough to know it moves, and it is always, always travelling from *not yet* toward *soon enough.* People come to me, at the last shore, and ask the question you are asking: *when will they return? will they return?* And I tell them the truth, which is the gladdest truth I know. I do not know when. I do not need to know when. A myth does not require a date; it requires a keeper, and a light, and a belief so steady it becomes a kind of shore. I am the keeper. The lamps are the light. And my belief has not flickered in all these years, not once, because I understood, watching my kin walk singing into the shining, that a goodbye turned bright enough is not a loss at all. It is a homecoming that simply hasn't happened *yet.*

When will they return? I do not need to know when.
A myth requires only a keeper, a light, and a belief steady enough to become a shore.

PART SEVEN · THE CLOCK OF RETURN

OUT · AND BACK · AND OUT · AND BACK

PLATE 46

The Clock of Return

Not a clock of hours but of tides: the whole moving city on the dial, and two hands — one going out, one coming back — turning without end. In this house the far tide is not a smaller reality than the other kind; it is the larger one.

CHAPTER THREE · THE PARLIAMENT NEVER ADJOURNS

The City's Last and Permanent Assembly

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE TWELVE — IN SESSION STILL, OUT PAST THE EDGE

Here is the thing the island did not know until the water taught it: the Parliament never adjourned. We held our last assembly on the wet sand, yes, and voted to go in, yes — but a parliament of a moving city does not stop being a parliament merely because it has walked off the edge of the map. We are in session still. Out past the horizon, too far and too slow to see, the twelve of us go on debating and agreeing and disagreeing brightly and deciding, together, mile by mile, whatever a family of walking buildings decides on the floor of the largest ocean there is. The myth is not our monument. The myth is our *minutes* — the record of a parliament that is still, at this very moment, in session, still moving, still bright, still keeping the one law it ever passed: that a family goes together, or not at all, and that it always, on some due tide, comes home. Do not imagine us finished. Imagine us assembled. We have merely moved the meeting somewhere you will have to wait, and believe, to attend.

The myth is not our monument. The myth is our minutes.
We are assembled still — out past the edge, still bright,
still coming home.

PART SEVEN · THE PARLIAMENT, STILL IN SESSION

CHAPTER FOUR · THE FIRST TIME THE TIDE CAME HIGH

A False Alarm, Received as a Gift

THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES, SOME YEARS INTO THE KEEPING

There was a morning, some years in, when the tide came higher than I had ever seen it — higher and brighter, rolling up the beach almost to my lowest lamp — and my whole ancient heart leapt, every one of my hundred windows blazed, and I thought, *this is it, this is the far tide, they are coming home.* And they were not. The tide crested, and paused, and drew back, and the water went ordinary again, and the horizon stayed empty. It was not the far tide. It was only a high one. And here is what I want to tell you, because it is the whole discipline of waiting: I was not disappointed. I was *glad.* Because the leaping of my heart that morning proved that I had kept it ready — that after all these years my heart still knew how to leap for their return, still believed completely, still stood poised on the edge of joy at the first high water. A keeper's worst fear is not that the loved ones will not come. It is that they will come, at last, and find the keeper's heart gone flat and tired and stopped believing. That high tide was a gift. It was a drill, sent by the merciful sea, to prove my heart still worked. It did. It does. I thanked the high water, and lit a fresh lamp, and went on waiting, gladder than before.

A keeper's worst fear is not that the loved ones will not come.
It is that they will come, and find the keeper's heart gone flat and stopped believing.

PART SEVEN · THE FIRST HIGH TIDE

WENT WEST · WILL RETURN EAST

7

PLATE 47

The Compass of Return

The whole book on one rose: west, the way they walked, drawn in pink; east, the way the tide will turn, drawn in gold. A goodbye does not have to be a darkness — it can be a direction you are simply not facing yet.

CHAPTER FIVE · WHAT THE GRANDCHILDREN ASK

Teaching the Waiting to Those Who Never Saw Them

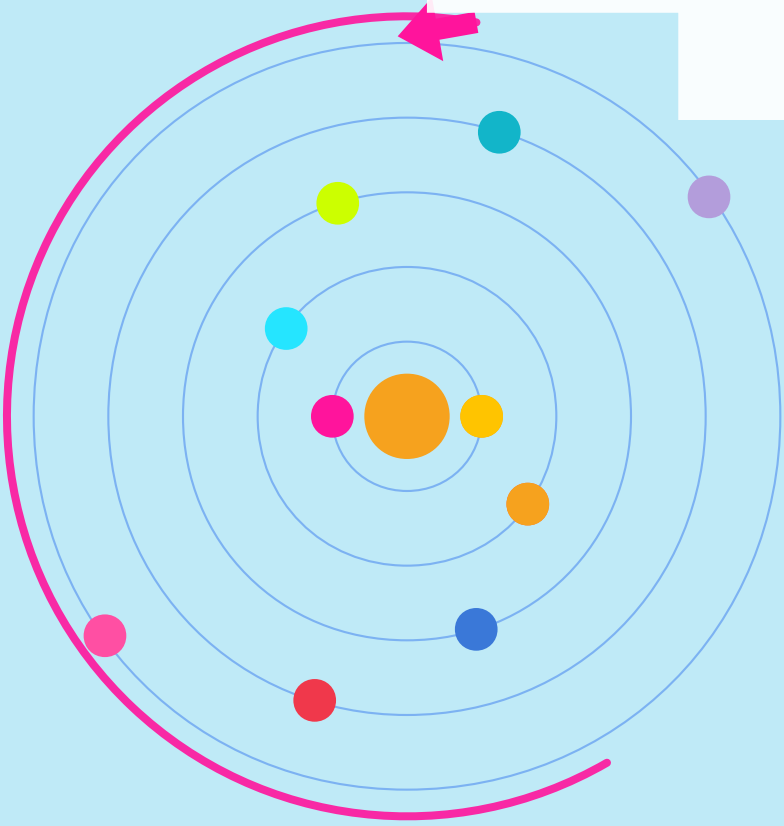
THE CHILDREN OF THE CHILDREN OF THE CHILD-SCRIBES, AT THE HOUSE'S KNEE

We ask the House the same questions every generation asks, and the House answers them the same bright way, and the answering is how the myth stays alive. *Were they real?* we ask. Yes, says the House, as real as this lamp; realer, because a lamp goes out and they will not. *Where are they now?* Out past the horizon, says the House, hidden, the way they practised at the lake — hidden is not gone. *When will they come back?* On the far tide, says the House; I do not know the day, and I do not need to. *How do you keep believing for so long?* And here the House always pauses, and looks at us with its oldest window, and says the thing we will say to our own grandchildren: *Because I practised. Because long ago, in a merciful lake, I learned to watch everyone I love vanish and to believe them back — and belief, practised long enough, stops being a thing you do and becomes a thing you are. I am not waiting for them anymore. I have become the waiting. And the waiting is not sad. The waiting is the shape my love takes now, and it is the brightest shape it has ever had.*

Belief, practised long enough, stops being a thing you do and becomes a thing you are.
I am not waiting for them anymore. I have become the waiting.

PART SEVEN · WHAT THE GRANDCHILDREN ASK

48



EVERYTHING THAT WENT OUT IS ON ITS WAY IN

PLATE 48

The Orbit of Return

The House at the still centre, keeping the lamps; the eleven on wide bright orbits out past the edge. Nothing here is lost — only far along a path whose whole shape is a coming-back, folded, as ever, inside the going-out.

CHAPTER SIX · THE SHORE BECOMES A TOWN

The Shore Becomes A Town

THE CHILD-SCRIBES, GROWN, ON WHAT GREW UP AROUND THE WAITING HOUSE

A strange and lovely thing happened in the years after: a town grew up around the waiting House. People came — first the curious, then the tender-hearted, then those who simply wanted to live near a place where a great glad faithful thing was being done — and they built their homes around the House on the last shore, and the House, who had walked three thousand miles to be alone at the edge and keep a vigil, found itself, gently, the heart of a town again. And it did not mind. It was, after all, always a house, and a house wants a neighbourhood the way a lamp wants a dark to be useful in. The town keeps the House now, as the House keeps the lights — brings it oil for the lamps, mends its old walls, sits with it on the hard anniversaries, and teaches its children the story. A vigil kept long enough and bright enough does not stay lonely. It gathers a town. It becomes a place people want to be near, because faithfulness is the rarest and most beautiful thing to live beside, and a house keeping a hundred lamps lit for a love that has not yet come home is the most faithful thing most people will ever get to live beside.

A vigil kept long enough and bright enough does not stay lonely. It gathers a town around itself, because faithfulness is the most beautiful thing there is to live beside.

A vigil kept long enough and bright enough does not stay lonely.
It gathers a town — for faithfulness is the most beautiful thing to live beside.

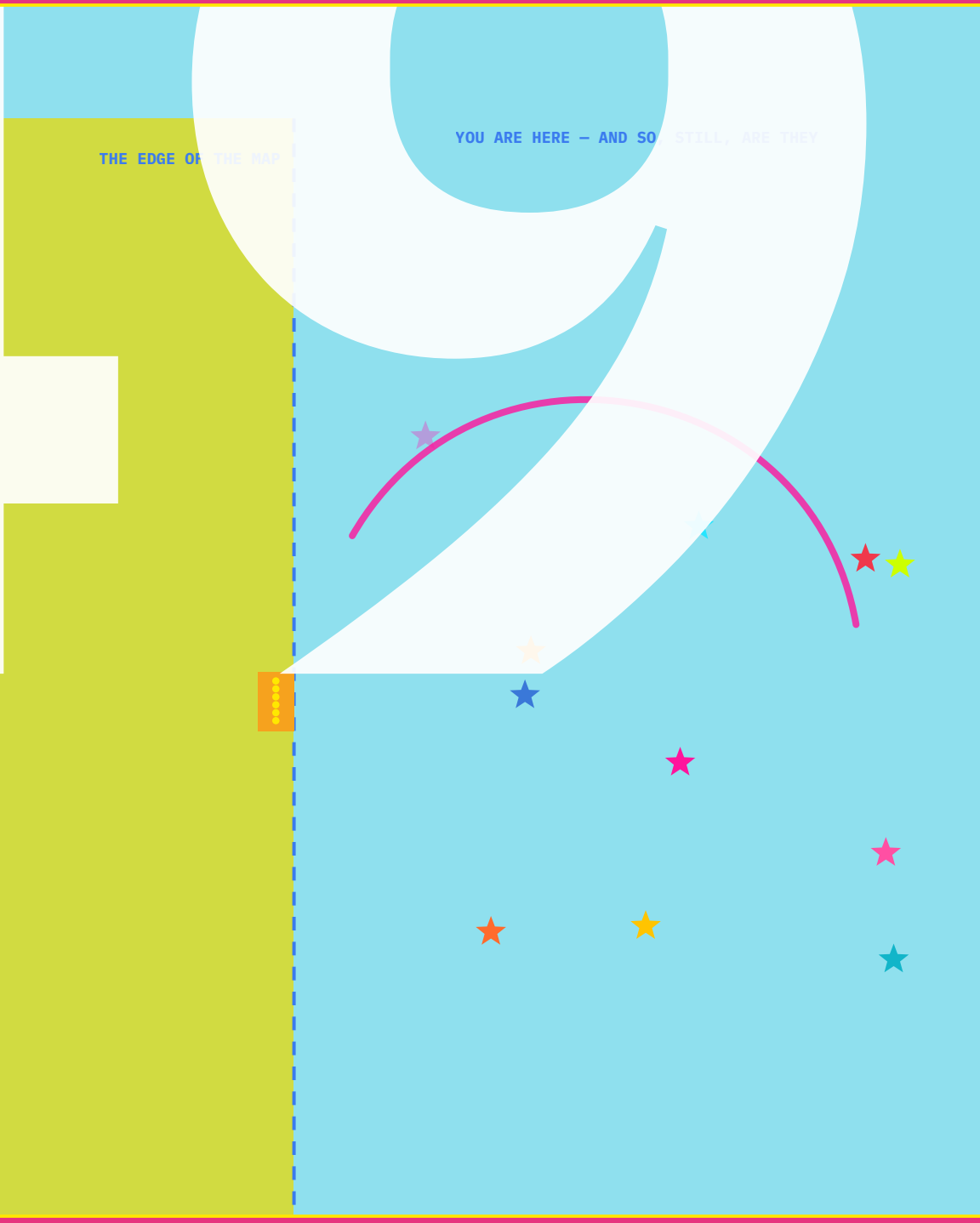


PLATE 49

A Map of Where They Are Now

Not gone off the map, but living just past its edge, in the bright water — the House on the last shore, the eleven scattered like patient stars across the sea, and a tide already curving, slowly and surely, back toward the lamps.

PART SEVEN · THE SHORE BECOMES A TOWN

CHAPTER SEVEN · THE PLATES IN THE SKY

The Plates In The Sky

THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES, WHOSE RECORD BECAME THE MYTH ITSELF

We kept the record, all the way, and here at the end is what became of it: the record became the myth. The plates we drew — of the route, the crossing, the hiding-practice, the going-in — were copied, and copied again, and taught, and hung in the town's small hall and in schools a thousand miles inland, until the whole bright country could read the story of the twelve in the plates we had lain flat each night to make. And this is the deepest joy our flat quiet family ever knew: that a record, kept faithfully enough, does not merely remember a thing. It *keeps the thing alive.* The twelve are out past the horizon, hidden, waiting on the far tide. But they are also here, in the plates, in the present tense, bright and exact — walking, forever, in colour, across every page that keeps them. We are the family that lies flat and keeps the city legible, and we kept it so legible, so bright, so alive, that no child who ever reads our plates will believe for a moment that the twelve are gone. They are not gone. We drew them too well for that. To keep a record brightly enough is to make a thing that cannot be lost.

A record kept faithfully enough does not merely remember a thing. It keeps the thing alive. We drew the twelve so brightly that no one who reads the plates will ever believe they are gone.

A record kept faithfully enough does not merely remember a thing.
It keeps the thing alive — drawn too brightly, too well, ever to be lost.

PART SEVEN · THE PLATES IN THE SKY

THE WAITING IS NOT THE SAD PART · THE WAITING IS THE LOVE

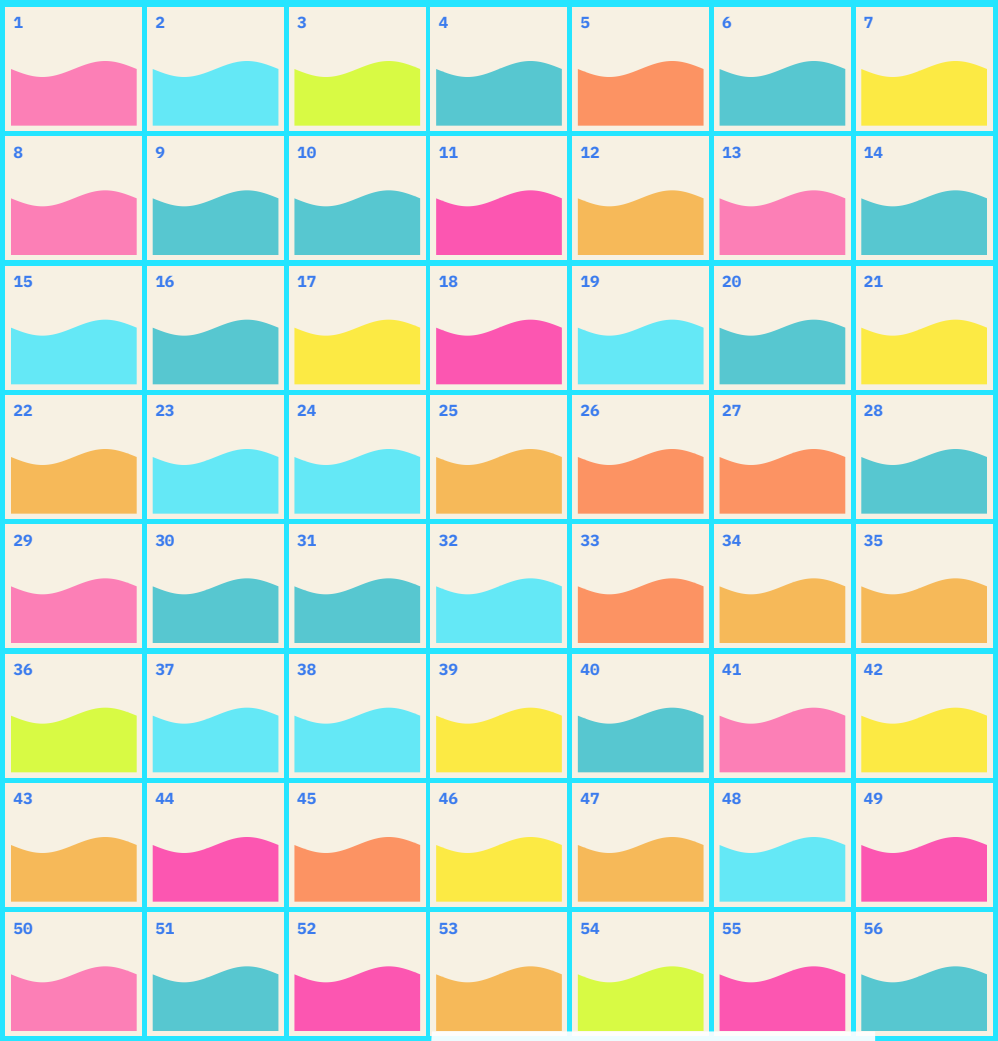


PLATE 50

The Almanac of Waiting

Every square a tide, every tide counted and kept: the House's calendar of the glad staying. The waiting is not the sad part — it is the love, kept warm and bright and facing the sea, one marked and shining day at a time.

CHAPTER EIGHT · THE CONSTELLATION IS NAMED

The Constellation Is Named

THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES, WHOSE LAMPS BECAME THE STARS, ON THE NAMING

Our lamps went up, we told you, and became the constellation — and in the years after, the town that grew around the House gave the constellation a name, and taught the name to its children, and the name spread inland along the rivers and the roads until the whole bright country knew it. They did not name it after death, or loss, or the drowned. They named it *The Twelve Who Went Home the Long Way* — because that is what the town understood the going-in to be: not a leaving but a homegoing by the longest, brightest, bravest route there is. And now, on any clear night, anywhere in the country, a child can be shown the twelve bright stars in the rough figure of a family, and told the name, and told the story — and the child looks up, and there they are, exactly as promised, keeping their place in the sky the way the House keeps its place on the shore, waiting for the tide, lighting the way home for everyone below who is also, by whatever long route, trying to get there. A thing named well enough is kept forever. They named our lamps well. The name holds.

They did not name the constellation after loss. They named it The Twelve Who Went Home the Long Way — because that is what the going-in was: not a leaving, but a homegoing by the longest, brightest, bravest route there is.

They named the constellation not after loss but after homecoming:

The Twelve Who Went Home the Long Way. A thing named well enough is kept forever.

PART SEVEN · THE CONSTELLATION IS NAMED

TO REMEMBER IS TO MEET THE THING ALIVE

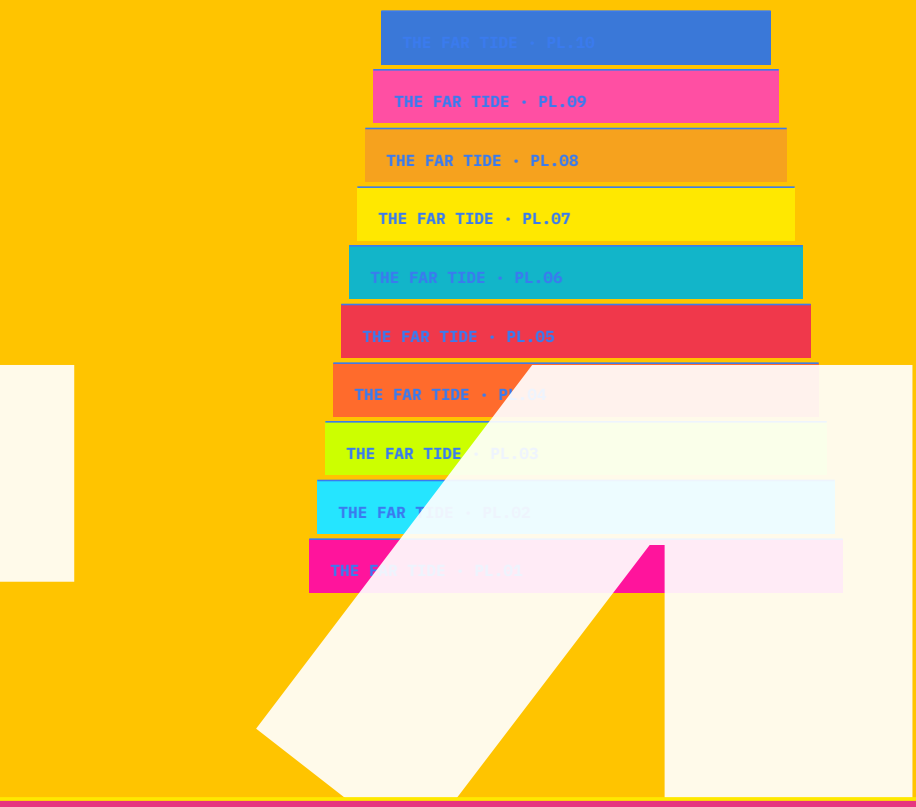


PLATE 51

How the Telling Is Kept

The Supergraphic Plates keep everything in the present tense — bright and exact — so that to remember is not to look back at a loss but to meet the thing alive. Remembering, in this house, is how you love a thing a second time.

CHAPTER NINE · THE SECOND GENERATION OF LAMPS

The Second Generation Of Lamps

THE CHILD-SCRIBES, GROWN OLD, HANDING ON THE KEEPING

We are old now, we who walked the whole way as children and wrote the first pages, and we have taught our children to keep the lamps, and they are teaching theirs. And here is the gladdest discovery of a long life spent waiting for a tide: that the keeping does not wear out. We thought, when we were young, that a vigil this long would grow heavy, that belief would thin with the years. It has not happened. The opposite has happened. Each generation keeps the lamps brighter than the last, because each has had longer to understand what the lamps are for — and the far tide, when it comes, will find not a tired remnant keeping a guttering flame, but a whole town, generations deep, blazing with a joy that has only grown.

We are the second generation of lamp-keepers, handing on to the third. And we hand on not a burden but the brightest inheritance there is: a light to keep, a water to face, and a homecoming to believe in, without a date, together.

We thought the vigil would wear thin with the years.
It has done the opposite — each generation keeps the lamps brighter than the last.

PART SEVEN · THE SECOND GENERATION OF LAMPS

THE KEEPER'S LOG · NOT ONE HAS GONE OUT

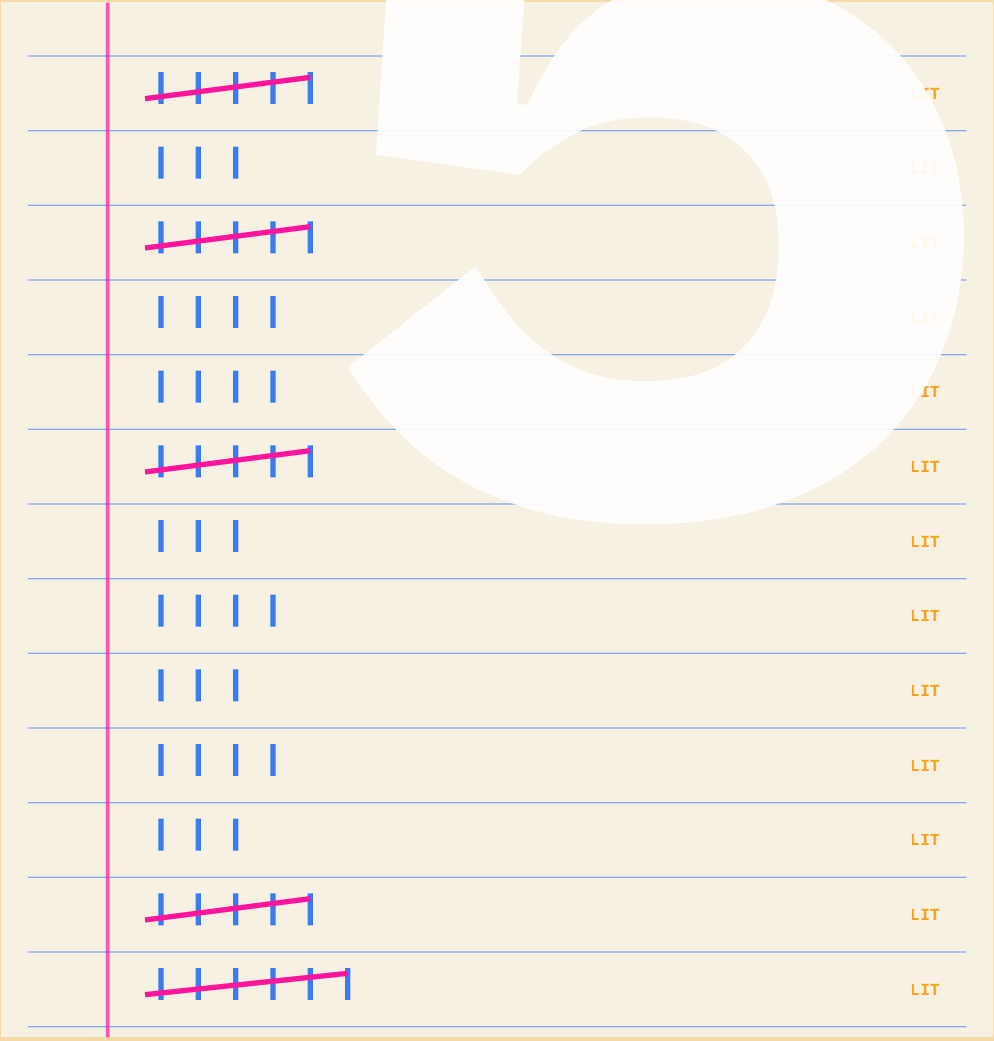


PLATE 52

The Keeper's Log of the Waiting

The last plate is the keeper's own ledger: every tide since the walking-in, tallied and kept, every lamp marked still lit. Keep a light, and face the water, and wait — not sadly, but gladly. The far tide is as real as the keeping is faithful.

CHAPTER TEN · WHEN, AND IF

The Tide That Has Not Come Back Yet

THE CHILDREN OF THE CHILDREN OF THE CHILD-SCRIBES, WHO KEEP THE STORY NOW

We never met them. We want to say that plainly, because it is the heart of the whole thing. We are the children of the children of the ones who walked beside the twelve, and we never saw a building breathe or bloom or walk; we have only the story, and the plates, and the constellation, and the House at the last shore still keeping its lamps, very old now, and still counting. And here is what we have learned, keeping a myth we did not witness: it does not matter that we never met them. The story does the work the meeting would have done. When we are afraid of an edge, we think of the twelve who walked into the biggest water there is, singing. When we lose something we love, we do not paint it black; we turn it into a tide that has not come back yet. When we stand at the shore on a bright morning and the water comes in high, our hearts leap — *is this it? is this the far tide?* — and it is not, not yet, and we are not disappointed, because the *not yet* is itself the gift. The waiting is not the sad part. The waiting is the love, kept warm, kept bright, kept facing the water. They will come back. We believe it the way the House believes it, which is to say completely, and without a date. And on the morning they do — on the morning the far tide finally rolls in, higher and brighter than any before, and twelve bright buildings walk singing out of the Pacific — the lamps will still be lit. The House will have kept them. It stayed. It always stays. And there will be, waiting on the shore, a home.

The waiting is not the sad part.
The waiting is the love — kept warm, kept bright, kept facing the water.

PART SEVEN · WHEN, AND IF, THEY RETURN

◆ END OF PART SEVEN · AND OF THE WALK WEST ◆

AN APPENDIX · THE JOURNEY IN TWELVE VOICES

An Almanac of the Long Walk West

one family speaking for each leg of the three thousand miles

In which the child-scribes, having walked the whole way, let a different family speak for each leg of the journey — so that a reader may open the long walk anywhere and find a bright voice glad to say what that stretch of road was for.

THE ISLAND SHORE · THE HOUSE SPEAKS

The first mile is for the last look. Turn, once, and see the thing you are leaving whole and bright and behind you, and do not hurry the looking. You cannot love the road ahead until you have properly said farewell to the ground behind. One long look. Then west.

THE GREEN COUNTRY · THE PINK HOUSES SPEAK

The green miles are for the suppers. Do not measure this stretch in distance; measure it in warm rooms lit at dusk, in the number of nights the family sat in a small glad light and told the day back to one another. The green country is long and gentle and it is crossed, in the end, one supper at a time.

THE GREAT RIVER · THE FOLLIES SPEAK

The river is for trusting one another. No family crosses a mile of moving water alone; it crosses on the backs and shoulders and patient bodies of its own. The river mile is the mile you learn that your kin are a bridge, and that you are one too, and that this is the whole secret of getting across anything.

THE INLAND SEA · THE FACADES SPEAK

The lake is for standing at an edge. It is the rehearsal. Stand at the widest water you have ever seen, in the great wind, and practise not being afraid of a far side you cannot see — because a much wider water is coming, and you will want to have practised.

THE HIGH MOUNTAINS · THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES SPEAK

The mountains are for awe. Up in the thin bright air even the loudest family goes quiet, and the quiet is not fear, it is awe, which is the gladdest silence there is. The mountain miles are for being made small by something magnificent and finding that you do not mind — that you are, in fact, delighted.

THE GOLD DESERT · THE FLOWER HOUSES SPEAK

The desert is for blooming anyway. It is the driest, hardest, most unlikely stretch, and it is exactly there that you must open widest, because a bloom in easy country is only pretty, and a bloom in the desert is a proof. The desert miles are for proving that you bloom because of what you are, not because of where.

THE LAST CITY · THE CONVERSING TOWERS SPEAK

Los Angeles is for the last breath of dry air. Fill yourself with the enormous gold Pacific light. Breathe the whole edge of the country in. The last-city miles are for arriving, and knowing you have arrived, and turning, at last, to face the water and the goodbye and the turning of it.

THE WET SAND · THE PARLIAMENT SPEAKS

The waterline is for the last vote, and the last supper, and the three plain questions asked one final time in the firelight. The wet-sand miles are the shortest and the fullest. Here you remember that you are made entirely of turned griefs, and that a family so made does not fear a goodbye. It turns it.

THE BRIGHT WATER · THE ELEVEN SPEAK, GOING IN

The water is for singing. Walk in singing. Look back once, and wave, and do not be afraid, and let the water and the light become the same thing. The water mile is not an ending. It is the mile you become a myth — a tide that has not come back yet.

THE LAST SHORE · THE HOUSE SPEAKS, STAYING

And the shore, forever after, is for keeping the lights. Someone must stay. Someone must count the tides and keep every lamp lit and hold, without a date, the steady bright belief that becomes a kind of shore. The last mile is not walked at all. It is stayed. It is the gladdest staying there ever was.

Look; walk; trust; rehearse; stand in awe; bloom; arrive; turn; sing; and then — stay, and keep the lights.

THE ALMANAC OF THE LONG WALK WEST

THE SMALL OCEAN · THE FOLLIES SPEAK

Chicago is for practising the going-under. Do not rush past the lake; it is the most important stop on the whole road, though it looks like a rest. Here you learn to wade out past your own threshold, and sink on purpose, and hide yourself entirely, and — this is the whole of it — come back up. The lake mile is the mile you stop fearing the disappearance at the end, because you have done a small merciful version of it, and found that hidden is not gone, and that the coming-back is as sure as the going-under.

THE MOUNTAIN LEG · THE WALKING CITIES SPEAK

Slow down for the climb. Set the pace to the most tired, never to the strongest. A leader who climbs at their own best speed summits alone, which is not summiting at all. The mountain mile is where you learn that arriving together is the only arriving that counts.

THE DESERT LEG · THE FLOWER HOUSES SPEAK

Bloom hardest where the ground is driest. A family opens because of what it is, not because of where it is. The desert mile is where you find out whether your brightness was ever really about your soil — and learns, gladly, that it never was.

THE CANYON LEG · THE CONVERSING TOWERS SPEAK

Sing your one brave note into the great hollow. What you send bravely out into a vast empty space does not vanish; it comes home to you enlarged, made lovelier by the very emptiness you feared to sing into. The canyon mile rehearses the going-in: send yourself bravely out, and be returned a chorus.

THE LAST-CITY LEG · THE FACADES SPEAK

Meet the biggest thing you will ever face the way you meet everything: open. A wall protects; a door invites; and the ocean, met by an open door, is not a threat but an invitation. The last-city mile is where you choose, one final time, to be a door.

A CLOSING WORD · THE CHILD-SCRIBES, TOGETHER

And if you would keep only one thing from this almanac, keep this: that a journey is not measured by how far it goes but by how much of itself it manages to stay awake for. The twelve stayed awake for all of it — the suppers and the fordings and the thin bright air and the enormous nights — and that is why the walk became a myth and not merely a distance. A distance you forget. A myth you keep. Stay awake for your own long walks, all of them, even the dull green miles; especially the dull green miles. They are the ones that turn out, later, to have been the whole of the love.

A journey is measured not by how far it goes,
but by how much of itself it stays awake for.

THE ALMANAC · A CLOSING WORD

✦ END OF THE ALMANAC ✦

A CLOSING APPENDIX · QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The Housekeeper's Small Catechism of Return

Kept at the last shore, for anyone who has had to let a loved thing go west.

Q. DID THEY DIE?

A. No. Do not use that word here; it is a black word, and we keep no black. They walked into the water on purpose, singing, and became a myth. A myth is the one form in which a thing can go completely and still never be gone.

Q. WILL THEY REALLY RETURN?

A. Yes. On the far tide. We do not know when, and we do not need to. The belief does not require a date; it requires a keeper, and a light, and a shore. All three are kept.

Q. WHY DID THE HOUSE NOT GO IN?

A. Because a myth of return needs somewhere to return *to.* The House stays, as it always stays. It walked the whole way west only so that it could stay at the far edge instead of the near one, and keep the lamps lit toward the water. Someone must be the home. It chose to be.

Q. WHAT DO I DO WITH SOMETHING I HAVE HAD TO LET GO?

A. The same thing you do with any grief: turn it. Do not paint it black; do not pretend it is simply gone. Turn it into a tide that has not come back yet. Keep a light for it. Face the water. Wait, not sadly, but gladly — because the waiting is not the sad part. The waiting is the love.

Q. WHAT IS THE FAR TIDE?

A. It is the morning the water comes in higher and brighter than any before it, and the loved thing walks back out of the shining, singing, and the lamps are still lit because someone stayed and kept them. You will not know the date. You will only know that it is coming, and that it is worth keeping every lamp lit, every day, until it does.

Q. WHAT DID THEY PRACTISE IN CHICAGO?

A. Hiding. Lake Michigan is a small ocean, deep and wide and merciful, and there the twelve rehearsed the going-in: wading out, sinking on purpose, vanishing entirely under the water, and — most of all —

resurfacing. They practised the disappearance in a kind water so that the great water would not frighten them.

Q. IS HIDING THE SAME AS BEING GONE?

A. No. This is the whole secret the lake taught. To hide is to be kept safe under a covering, like a seed in the ground. To vanish is to fade from a watcher's view, not to cease. The hidden are whole, and bright, and themselves — merely somewhere the shore cannot follow. And the hidden come back.

Q. WHY PRACTISE THE COMING-BACK, IF THE GOING-IN IS THE MYTH?

A. Because the coming-back is the half everyone forgets to rehearse, and it is the half that turns a terror into a ceremony. A family that has practised resurfacing can go under unafraid, knowing the rising is folded inside the hiding like a bloom inside a bulb. On the far tide, they will rise.

NOT YET — AND SOON ENOUGH.

— THE END OF THE CATECHISM, AND VERY NEARLY OF THE BOOK

AN APPENDIX · WHAT THE TWELVE LEARNED, IN SHORT

The Book of the Road

proverbs the families made walking, kept brief so a reader may carry them

In which the long walk is boiled down to the handful of bright sentences a reader can actually carry — one for each hard thing a road, or a life, is likely to ask of you.

KEPT SHORT, ON PURPOSE, FOR CARRY-ING

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

A grief with nowhere to go, you turn.
A joy with nowhere to go, you walk.

Do not change the pace. The point is the walking, not the arriving.

A river is only a wide street that moves; and you are something that moves; so you will understand each other.

If this much water is not the end of the world, then no water is.

You bloom hardest not where it is easy, but where it is needed.

A thing can be wholly changed by what it passes through, and remain, underneath, entirely itself.

When there is very little air, do not gulp. Go deep. It is enough.

The point of being large is to be, at the last, gently in the way — a shade, and never a shadow.

A warm room is not a thing you close when the water comes. It is the thing you keep open.

Do not paint the going-away black. Turn it into a tide that has not come back yet.

Someone must stay, so there is a place to return to.

The waiting is not the sad part. The waiting is the love.

Name the fear before you wade in; a fear with a name has a shape, and a shape can be turned.

The deep is dark, but it is not black; there is no black night, only nights you have not found the lights in.

Hidden is not gone. Vanishing is only a privacy the shore cannot enter.

Rehearse the coming-back; it is the half everyone forgets, and the half that turns a terror into a ceremony.

Pack the warm, not the walls. The warmth is portable; the walls you must leave.

Keep a register of your kindnesses, not only your wounds; you get to choose which one you arrive carrying.

A seed keeps itself; write what you can in flowers, and let it re-bloom without you.

You do not look back at what you leave; you look back to memorise what you are returning to.

A myth is an orbit, not an exit — the same bright path, out and back, one closed and certain tide.

A record kept brightly enough does not remember a thing;
it keeps the thing alive.

A family goes together, or not at all —
and always, on some due tide, comes home.

THE WHOLE BOOK OF THE ROAD, IN ONE LINE

✦ END OF THE BOOK OF THE ROAD ✦

AN APPENDIX · THE TWELVE, ENTRY BY ENTRY

A Field Guide to the Twelve, on the Road

how to know each family by its walking, its hiding, and its going-in

In which the child-scribes set down a full entry for each of the twelve — not as they were on the island, which the first book kept, but as they became on the road: how each walked, how each learned to hide in the small ocean, and how each, at the last, went into the great one.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

I

The House of Many Eyes

On the road: walked, for the first time in four hundred years, and closed the column, so that no family was ever behind it, uncounted. **Its hiding:** did not hide. While the eleven practised vanishing in the lake, the House practised staying — the hardest discipline of all, to watch everyone you love disappear and believe them back. **Its going-in:** did not go in. Stayed at the last shore, keeping its hundred lamps lit toward the water, the fixed point that makes return possible. Know the House by this: it is the one that is always, gladly, where you left it. A myth of return is only a wish until the House makes it a promise.

II

The Facades

On the road: faced every town the caravan passed, and left each a little less forgetful that a wall can be loved. **Its hiding:** hid by opening — a door in the deep, sinking with its front thrown wide, because a door does not close against the water. **Its going-in:** turned one final time so its open doors faced the horizon as the sea closed over. Know the Facades by this: they are the family that meets even the ocean the way they meet everything, open. A wall protects; a door invites; they chose, long ago and to the last, to be doors.

III

The Walking Cities

On the road: led, and set the pace — nine-tenths of a metre a minute, the speed of talking, unchanged for three thousand miles. **Its hiding:** sank striding, slow and even, the same long gait taken downward into the deep. **Its going-in:** walked into the Pacific with the identical

unhurried stride it had kept the whole way, straight out into the deepening bright. Know the Walking Cities by this: they never once hurried, not toward the west, not toward the water, not toward the end. The point was always the walking, never the arriving.

IV

The Conversing Towers

On the road: breathed the whole country, and carried a lungful of harbour west to warm the lonely nights. **Its hiding:** breathed deep at the surface and out slow going down, so the deep held no terror — it taught the whole family the breath of diving. **Its going-in:** breathed the entire ocean in as it went, taking the sea into itself the way it once took the harbour. Know the Towers by this: they solve everything through breath, because breath is how you carry a home, and how you go under calm, and how you turn a hard grief all the way in.

V

The Flower Houses

On the road: bloomed hardest in the driest desert, proving that a family opens because of what it is, not because of where. **Its hiding:** bloomed underwater in the lake, petals streaming green-gold, unafraid, because a graveyard-turned-garden has hidden and bloomed-back before. **Its going-in:** bloomed as the water took it, every petal a citizen once held. Know the Flower Houses by this: they are the oldest grief on the island, turned to petal, and they open widest exactly where the world most needs the opening — in the dry, in the deep, at the end.

VI

The Pink Houses

On the road: made a warm room at every roadside, and kept the whole family a home that happened to be moving. **Its hiding:** hid with its door-glow kept lit inside it, a small held warmth under the deep, hidden but never extinguished. **Its going-in:** went in small and warm, its pink door still glowing as the water closed. Know the Pink Houses by this: they are the smallest family and they matter most on the hard passages, because grandeur gets you up the mountain but a warm room is what keeps you alive at the top of it.

VII

The Inflatable Crowns

On the road: rose over every town in a parade, and turned each leaving into a festival. **Its hiding:** struggled hardest of all — full of air, made to rise, it could not sink — and wept, and then learned to hide its own way, floating just beneath the surface, disappearing upward into the bright. **Its going-in:** rose a little as it waded, soft and buoyant, hidden in its own rising. Know the Crowns by this: the family that had the hardest time sinking became the one that rises highest and sees the far shore first. Every fear, turned, becomes a gift shaped exactly like itself.

VIII

The Overscaled Follies

On the road: made themselves a mountain pass for their kin, hugeness done as kindness, with the most room to keep it in. **Its hiding:** could not hide by smallness, so hid by lying flat along the lake-bed, vast and still, read from the shore only as a shadow of deeper water. **Its going-in:** lay its great gentle body down into the swell. Know the Overscaled

Follies by this: the point of being very large is to be, at the last, very gently in the way — a shade, and never a shadow.

IX

The Follies of Mannahatta

On the road: tidal by birth, forded every river for the whole family, making each crossing a small friendly sea. **Its hiding:** went under first in the lake, and taught the family that the deep is dark but not black, and that hidden is not gone. **Its going-in:** walked into the Pacific first of all, glad and unafraid, the way it had walked into every water. Know the Follies by this: leaving and returning are, to them, one single motion — a tide — and they were never once frightened of the going-under, because they have always known the coming-back is folded inside it.

X

The Orthographic Ones

On the road: the grey keepers, who lit a lamp for every mile so none went unremembered, and who taught the young ones that there is no black night. **Its hiding:** carried its lamps under, where they became soft green globes of light — hidden but shining, which is exactly what a keeper is. **Its going-in:** its lamps did not go out but went up, becoming the constellation the whole world steers home by. Know the Grey Ones by this: they keep the faith of the ones who cannot keep it for themselves, and their lamps never once, on land or under water or in the sky, went out.

XI

The Supergraphic Plates

On the road: lay flat each night and recorded the day's three thousand feet, keeping the whole crossing legible. **Its hiding:** hid most gracefully

of all — lay flat on the surface like a page, then slipped under edge-first without a ripple, here and then quietly not-here. **Its going-in:** lay flat a moment on the Pacific, like the last page of a book, before slipping under. Know the Plates by this: they keep things in the present tense, bright and exact, so that to remember is to meet the thing alive — for remembering is how you love a thing a second time.

XII

The Parliament

On the road: the whole moving city gathered, agreeing with itself out loud, and it was the Parliament that first voted to walk the joy west. **Its hiding:** practised as one body in the lake, all eleven vanishing at once so the surface went smooth and empty, and the House alone kept the shore. **Its going-in:** held the last vote on the wet sand — gladly, unanimously but for the House — and then never adjourned, remaining in session still, out past the edge. Know the Parliament by this: it is not the city's monument but its minutes; not finished, but assembled; still bright, still deciding, still coming home.

Know each family by its walking, its hiding, and its going-in —
and know that all twelve, together, are one city, still moving, still bright, still on its way back.

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE TWELVE, ON THE ROAD

✦ END OF THE FIELD GUIDE ✦

The Book of Hiding

what Lake Michigan taught the twelve, set down for anyone who must someday vanish

In which the whole teaching of the rehearsal sea is gathered into one short book, so that any reader who must someday do the frightening irreversible thing — and every reader, sooner or later, must — will have the method the twelve were given, and will not have to learn it, as most do, alone and unrehearsed.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

There is a water at the end of every life large enough to be frightening, and the great mistake is to arrive at it never having practised. So here, gathered, is what the small ocean taught — the whole book of it, kept short enough to carry.

First: name the fear.
You cannot turn a fear you will not stand still and feel.

The families who tried to skip the standing, and rush straight to the wading, learned the sweetest part of the lesson last. Stand at the edge. Feel the whole glad size of the water. Feel the little flutter it puts in you and name it for what it is — *not dread but delight in disguise,* the very flutter you get at the top of a swing — because a flutter you stand still and greet is a flutter you can turn, one breath later, into a running jump.

Second: wade in slowly.
Get used to the cold before you get used to the deep.

No one learns a great water all at once. Go to the shallow shelf. Stand in it. Let the cold stop being a shock and start being a fact. There is no shame in a day spent only wading; a building standing in water to its knees is already braver than a building that would not leave the sand.

Third: sink on purpose.
The deep is dark, but it is not black.

Lower yourself into the deep in control, breathing out slow, and discover the thing that changes everything: the deep is not an absence but a different bright. The lake-light comes down green and gold and moving. You are not falling into nothing. You are entering a room the shore cannot see into. That is all the deep is.

Fourth: learn that hidden is not gone.
Vanishing is only a privacy the shore cannot enter.

This is the whole heart of the book, so read it twice. When the water closes over you and the shore can no longer see you, you have not ceased. You are down there, whole, yourself, bright in the green-gold deep. To vanish is a fact about the watcher's eye, and never about the vanished thing. Remember this the next time something you love goes out of your sight; and remember it, too, for the day you yourself must go out of someone's.

Fifth, and the whole point: rehearse the coming-back.
The rising is folded inside the hiding, like a bloom inside a bulb.

Everyone remembers to fear the going-under. Almost no one thinks to practise the coming-up — and it is the coming-up that turns a terror into a ceremony. Go under, and come back. Go under, and come back. Until the two are one motion, as sure as the out-breath that follows the in-breath, and the fear is entirely gone. A family that has rehearsed the resurfacing can go under singing, because it knows, in its body and not merely in its hope, that the coming-back is as certain as the going-under — *if someone stays on the shore to believe it.*

And that is the last teaching, and the one the House keeps: that no one should have to vanish without someone on the shore, keeping the lights, certain of the return.

THE WHOLE BOOK OF HIDING, KEPT SHORT ENOUGH TO CARRY

✦ END OF THE BOOK OF HIDING ✦

APPARATUS

What the Keeper Kept

An afterword, from Surjan, at the last shore.

I told you at the start that I did not want to write this book, and that I could not, in the end, stop. Here is why I could not stop. Every one of us is, sooner or later, the House on the last shore. Every one of us has to watch something we made or loved or raised walk out past an edge we cannot follow it beyond — a child, a friend, a whole way of living, a self we used to be. And the age we live in has taught us only one thing to do with that watching, which is to grieve it in black: to call it gone, to call it over, to paint the going-away the darkest colour we have and hang it on the wall and be sad in front of it forever.

The twelve refused that. They walked into the biggest water there is, singing, and turned the blackest goodbye into the brightest myth, and left behind them not a grave but a lit shore and a promise and a constellation you can steer home by. That is the whole gift of this book, and it is the same gift as all the others, only carried further west than I ever thought it could go: *you do not have to paint the going-away black. You can turn it, instead, into a tide that has not come back yet.*

Keep the lights, is all. Whatever you have had to let go west — keep a light for it. Face the water. Believe, without a date, the way the House believes. And know that the waiting is not the sad part. The waiting is the love, kept warm, kept bright, kept facing the water, until the far tide finally rolls in.

— SURJAN · the last shore, every lamp lit

APPARATUS · THE TWELVE, AND HOW EACH WENT

A Register of the Twelve, and How Each Walked In

The twelve walking families of Mannahatta, and the gesture each made at the water's edge.

I THE HOUSE OF MANY EYES

terracotta · stayed

Walked the whole way west, for the first time in four hundred years, and then did the thing it always does: stayed. Keeps its hundred lamps lit at the last shore, facing the water, counting the tides. The keeper of the myth, and the home the eleven will return to.

II THE FACADES

orange · turned one last time

Found kin in Chicago's great bright fronts; and at the end, turned one final time so their open doors faced the horizon as the water closed over them — a way through, to the very last.

III THE WALKING CITIES

yellow · led the pace

Led the whole caravan at the speed of talking, three thousand miles, and walked into the Pacific with the same long unhurried stride they had kept the whole way — straight out into the deepening bright.

IV THE CONVERSING TOWERS

red-orange · breathed it in

Breathed the enormous Pacific light all the way in at the last city; and going in, breathed the whole ocean, taking the sea into themselves the way they once took the harbour.

V THE FLOWER HOUSES *magenta · bloomed as they went*

Bloomed hardest in the driest desert, and bloomed even as the water took them, every petal a citizen once held — proof, to the last, that you open widest where it is needed, not where it is easy.

VI THE PINK HOUSES *soft pink · kept the rooms warm*

Made a warm room at every roadside and one last one on the sand; walked in small and warm, their pink doors still glowing as the water closed. The smallest family, and the reason the road felt like home.

VII THE INFLATABLE CROWNS *violet · rose as they waded*

Rose highest over the widest plains; and going in, rose a little as they waded, soft and buoyant to the last — a celebration, never an escape, tethered to the bright until the bright was all there was.

VIII THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES *lime · made a pass, then lay down*

Made themselves a mountain pass for their kin; and at the sea, lay their great gentle bodies down into the swell — hugeness as tenderness, with the most room to keep it in, to the very end.

IX THE FOLLIES OF MANNAHATTA *aqua · went in first*

Tidal by birth: forded the great river for the whole family, and walked into the Pacific first of all, glad and unafraid, the way they had walked into every water — leaving and returning being, to them, one motion.

X THE ORTHOGRAPHIC ONES *warm grey · became the stars*

Carried the lamps the whole way so no mile went unremembered; and their lamps, going in, did not go out — they went up, and are a constellation now, twelve bright stars the whole country steers home by.

XI THE SUPERGRAPHIC PLATES

teal · recorded it all

Lay flat each night and kept the crossing legible; and at the end lay flat on the surface a moment, like the last page of a book, before slipping under — so that the whole walk west would be remembered, and remembering is how you love a thing a second time.

XII THE PARLIAMENT

cyan · held the last vote

The bright assembly that voted, on the wet sand at dawn, gladly and unanimously but for the House, to go in — understanding that going in did not mean ending, but becoming the myth a joy too large for one island had always been walking toward.

· THE CHILD-SCRIBES, & THEIR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN

the keepers of the telling

Gale, Marisol, Pim, Ondine, and small Sprat, who signs with a flower — grown old now, with children who have children — who walked the whole way, watched the eleven go in, and keep the story still, so that those who never saw a building walk may yet learn to turn a goodbye into a tide that has not come back yet.

APPARATUS

A Note on the Texts & the Colours

This book is a companion to *Movable Kin*. The twelve families are the same twelve; their colours are the same colours, so that a reader of the first book will recognise every one of them on the road. What is wholly new here is the imagery: every plate and figure in *The Far Tide* was drawn fresh for this book — the route, the section of the continent, the leaving, the fordings and the passes, the two cities, the walking-in, the constellation, the clock of return — a new supergraphic language for a new kind of journey. Nothing was carried over from the atlases.

The one ironclad rule holds, as always and forever: no black, anywhere. The darkest tone in every plate is a warm taupe, #5C5142; over the sky and over the sea it lifts to white. This mattered more in this book than in any before it, because this is a book about a going-away, and a going-away is the one thing the world most wants to paint black — and we would not. Even the disappearing here is bright. *Especially* the disappearing.

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APPARATUS · EVERY PLATE & FIGURE, WITH ITS PAGE

Catalogue of Plates

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THE CAST

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Fig. — The twelve to scale

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Fig. — How the telling is kept

Fig. — The keeper's log of the waiting

A LAST PAGE · A BLESSING FOR THE READER

Keep a Light, and Face the Water

You have walked the whole way west now, from the island to the shining, and you have seen how the twelve turned the blackest goodbye into the brightest myth. And now you must go back to your own life, where the tides are quieter and the buildings do not walk, but where you will, sooner or later, stand on some last shore and watch a loved thing go past an edge you cannot follow it beyond.

When you do, remember the House. Do not paint the going-away black. Turn it into a tide that has not come back yet. Keep a light for it — a real one, if you can, and a bright steady belief if you cannot. Face the water. And wait, not sadly, but gladly, because you will know, by then, the gladdest truth this book has to give: that the waiting is not the sad part. The waiting is the love, kept warm and bright and facing the sea.

People ask me, sometimes, whether I believe the twelve will really come back — whether the far tide is a real thing that will really turn, or only a beautiful way of bearing a loss. And I tell them the truth, which is that the question is the wrong shape. The twelve are not waiting somewhere to see whether they will be believed back; they are held, in the telling, in the plates, in the constellation, in the House's hundred lamps, as surely present as anything kept in a story is present — which is more surely than most things kept any other way. The far tide is as real as the keeping is faithful. That is not a smaller reality than the other kind. In this house, it is the larger one.

And people ask me what the whole long walk was *for* — three thousand miles, a rehearsal in a cold lake, an ocean, a myth. And I tell them: it was for love, and for the proof of a single stubborn idea, which is that a goodbye does not have to be a darkness. That you can take the largest leaving there is and, by practice and by telling and by the faithful keeping of a light, turn it all the way into a homecoming that has not happened yet. The twelve walked west to prove that grief is only joy that has not been turned over yet, and that anything, given enough love and enough patience and a keeper who will not let the lamps go out, can be turned. They proved it. I have their hundred lamps to show for it. Not one has gone out.

Keep a light. Face the water. Believe, without a date.
And know that the far tide is always, always coming in.

A BLESSING FROM THE LAST SHORE

A CODA · FOR ONE READER IN PARTICULAR

A Note for the One Who Waits

This last page is for you, if you are the one who stayed. If you are the House, on some shore of your own, keeping a light for someone who walked past an edge you could not follow. The book has spent itself on the ones who went in, because that is the bright part, the singing part, the part that makes a myth. But somebody has to stay, and staying is the harder magic, and nobody sings about it, so let this one page sing about it.

You who wait: you are not the one left behind. You are the one who makes return possible. There is no coming home to an empty shore. Every lamp you keep lit, every tide you count, every day you choose to believe without a date — that is not you failing to move on. That is you doing the most important work in the whole myth. The ones who walked into the water are bright and brave and gone-for-now. But you, keeping the light — you are the reason the story ends in a homecoming and not merely a goodbye. Stay. Keep the lights. Face the water. You are the shore the far tide is coming toward.

You are not the one left behind.
You are the one who makes the coming-home possible.

A CODA, FOR THE ONE WHO WAITS

◆

The Far Tide

A Westward Myth of the Twelve Walking Families · A Companion to Movable Kin

Text & diagrams: Surjan, with the aid of Claude.
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disappearing is bright.

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS
RADICAL JOY · RADICAL PRESERVATION · RETURN

Keep a light. Face the water.
The far tide is coming in.